

The Man of Average by Mylesime

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Summary:

Twenty-five years after the events with the Upside Down, Mike and Will are living quite different lives. One is a world famous porn star, LGBT sex activist and billionaire. The other, your average American middle-class man, stuck in a loveless marriage in his parent's house with a job he despises and three children. In spite of unresolved feelings known to all, both men try to keep the past in the past and act as friends. But things get tougher when Ravi, Will's boyfriend of ten years, invites the whole Wheeler family to spend the summer on their private island. Shock comes when Nathaniel, Mike's fifteen year-old son and spitting image of Mike at the same age when he and Will were lovebirds, suddenly confesses unrequited feelings for Will, throwing him into a dark ocean of confusion he won't be able to come through and put his lifelong defended moral convictions to the test.

Please, read the tags and be responsible in your reading.

1. A dinner at the Wheelers

Author's Note:

Hey guys! New story! I'm trying something new here so I hope you'll like it :)

It's heavily inspired by the movies American Beauty and Chloe.

2011 - Hawkins

Mike Wheeler was a man of average, born and raised in the small, provincial town of Hawkins, Indiana to a traditional nuclear American family with his parents and two sisters. They were all grown now, his sisters living their life in Seattle and San Diego and parents gone to Florida. His childhood friends had left too, years ago, only returning occasionally to visit their aging folks. And now, it was just Mike and his own nuclear family. He had lived in the city for a while, during his College years, until he met a young woman named Jezebel Markowski, an American girl from Polish descent he married at twenty five after she'd gotten pregnant with their unexpected son. And they moved from the city back to Hawkins, in his parents' house that he inherited for the occasion. And just like that, Mike's life was sealed. Two years later, they had a daughter and four years after that, another one, completing the perfect American family painting of mommy, daddy and their three adorable cherubs.

Jezebel was a stay-at-home mom and Mike worked as a clerk in a printing company. Not the most exciting of jobs but it paid the bills and provided food for the whole family which was all that was needed, really.

He didn't hate his life. Not really. Not *completely*. Sure, it wasn't exciting. Younger, he dreamed of becoming a famous writer, turning his campaigns into full fledged stories that would captivate crowds. He wanted to be the new Tolkien. *The new Tolkien!* Thirty years later, he laughed at his own candid naivety. He wanted to live on a boat too, with only love and sun and water as fuel. You're stupid like that when you're twenty and he was no different.

Now, at forty, all his childhood dreams had long been buried and forsaken. He couldn't stay idle with a child coming and selling printers was a mature job, an adult job, something real and responsible. And his house was clean and homey. Jezebel was good at this kind of thing. And she always wore floral dresses with her blond hair tied in a loose bun.

He sniffled, securing his bag of groceries under his arm and opened the car with the other. Looking absentmindedly at his surroundings, his eyes fell on the facade of the bookstore just across the street and he froze. Among the books and magazines on display, there was the new edition of People magazine.

The title read, *"WILL BYERS, THE CONQUEROR, HOW HE REVOLUTIONIZED THE PORN INDUSTRY."*

His heart sunk in his chest. Will Byers was his best friend from childhood, among other things. They had grown up together in this small town before Will brutally moved to Chicago with his mother and siblings when he was fourteen. Now, his best friend, among other things, and Godfather of his elder daughter, was a porn star! If someone had told him decades prior that shy, cute little Will would end up fucking men in front a camera and pose naked in magazines for a million dollars, he wouldn't have believed them! This just wouldn't have made any sense. And yet. Will *was* a porn star. A Superstar even. And it was damn awkward. He had never watched any of Will's movies per se. He had roamed the Internet sometimes, out of boredom and curiosity, falling across a video of Will being sucked off in oil, and it had made him uncomfortable as hell. A bit grossed out too. The worst was visiting him on set. *Oh boy*, that was unpleasant. And Mike avoided it unless he didn't have a choice, like this one time he had to let baby Nate to Will's care because Jezebel was having post birth complications and Mike had to go to work to pay for the hospital bill.

Bursting in the studio with a crying baby and crossing rooms full of naked men and women doing all sorts of sexual activities everywhere only to find his best friend naked, his cock buried in a stranger's ass with a camera right on them and a guy on a chair, shouting "Try another angle honey, so we can see your lovely cock better!" was a most awkward, most surreal experience he'd ever lived and never

wanted to reproduce. When he told his wife he'd left their two weeks old infant on a porn set, she yelled at him, said it was going to leave their child traumatized and scarred. Fifteen years later, Nate didn't look traumatized or scarred. He was a polite and well behaved kid, did good in school, had healthy friends. And most importantly, he wasn't interested in dating, which was a very, very good point as far as his religious mom was concerned. He didn't seem to be interested in girls or boys - Mike wouldn't have cared if it were the case - and spent his days reading and playing video games. And he loved Will. All his kids did. Will was like a surrogate dad to them and Mike was glad. Will was very important to him, after all.

Jezebel had her reservations. She disapproved of his job and lifestyle, among other things, but she was clever enough to know not to interfere in her husband and his best friend's complicated relationship. And she knew Will was a good and healthy man, dedicating his life to helping young people.

He blinked, swallowing on empty, his eyes still glued on the magazine cover.

It was a photo of Will clothed (for once), wearing a revealing black shirt that stuck to his toned body, showing glimpses of skin and tattoos from its designed holes. His bronze-colored hair was disheveled in an elaborated mess, his hand holding his head with a cigarette between two fingers, his pink, full lips, parted to expire a round of smoke. It wasn't fully sexual but it still was a very erotic photo. Inviting. Sinful. But then again, Will was sin incarnated. And it made Mike's heart hammer in his chest and ears buzz, oblivious to the rest of the world.

He sucked in a deep breath, forcing unsolicited memories away. Those days were long gone. He wasn't bitter. He *wasn't*. He had chosen this life. It was for the best, the right - mature - thing to do! He sighed, still looking at Will's flawless beauty. He was still as breathtakingly gorgeous as when he was twenty. And it wasn't even that photoshopped. Mike knew the guy in real life, after all. Will was flawless naturally. And Mike, with his growing baldness, beer belly and stress wrinkles paled in comparison. He was far from the dark-haired tantalizing ephebe he used to be. Really far... He barely recognized himself anymore.

He shook his head. This wasn't the moment to reflect and wallow in self-pity. He was passed forty and didn't have Will's money. He didn't have time to go to the gym or get a personal coach. He didn't have time to do yoga, diet and care for himself. He worked twelve hours a day for minimum wage and had three kids to look after! Will didn't. Will spent his days soaked in massage oil with his cock constantly warmed up!

In opposition, Mike had sex maybe once or twice a month, at best! And most of the time an unsatisfactory quickie before sleep in the dark.

Clearly, they lived quite different lives.

He sighed to himself. Will was coming over for dinner later that evening and he was happy to see him. He was coming with his boyfriend Ravi, a nice guy. A porn actor too. Not as famous as Will but they still shot a lot of sextapes together and Ravi was known enough in the gay porn scene. They had been together for ten years but didn't have any children. Will said it was for the best, given their job and life. He didn't want his kid to be under media scrutiny. This was a cruel world after all and Mike could only agree with Will, even if it was a waste. Will would have made a wonderful dad.

He frowned, clearing his thoughts, and pushed the bag of groceries in the back seat of the car before hopping in and turning the engine, Will's photo cover following him from the corner of his eye down the street.

He made it home in minutes, calling for his wife as he entered their house. It hadn't changed much from when he was a kid himself. The furniture was mostly the same, with the same old tattered couch and white carpet. The only things that did change were the new, modern flat TV screen, a new minibar, and pictures of his wife and children hanging on the walls and the fireplace. It smelled the same too. Like old cracking wood and dust.

Jezebel joined him in the hall, a wooden fork in hand, pink apron secured around her hips. She was a petite woman with small curves and long wavy blond hair.

"Did you find the chicken?" she asked in her high-pitched voice.

"I found breast plates," he answered, taking them from the bag. "Is this what you wanted?"

She rolled her eyes, eyeing the meat package with a pout of disgust and annoyance.

"I told you to take a full organic chicken! I'm not going to serve Will and Ravi cheap chicken breast plates! They're probably coming with an extravagant dessert or bottle of wine!" she put her hands on her hips, something she always did when she was upset, "Breast plates! Really, Mike?!"

Mike sighed, already feeling tired, "Well, I couldn't find your organic chicken!" he said, removing his jacket that he hang on the coat-hanger by the door.

"Did you just look?" she insisted.

"Yes, yes I did! I searched every alley. I couldn't find anything. There was only that!"

She huffed, looking into the bag, shaking her head disapprovingly before disappearing with it in the kitchen, mumbling to herself words he couldn't decipher. He rolled his eyes, glad for the returned silence. At the same moment, Julie, his seven year-old daughter came running down the stairs and jumped in his arms happily.

"Daddy!"

"Hey sweetie!" he replied, adjusting his grip so that she wouldn't fall, "How was your day?"

"I did that for Will," she exclaimed, showing him a sort of necklace she had made herself with pearls.

"It's beautiful, sweet pea. Will is going to love it."

Her face broke into a huge, toothless smile. He put her down with a small grimace of muscle fatigue. He was getting too old for that.

"There's one for Ravi too."

"That's good. He's gonna love it."

Her smile widened and she disappeared into the lounge, jumping on the sofa with her homemade necklaces.

Jezebel's voice rose from the kitchen.

"Mike?" she called, "Can you do the laundry?"

He sighed. She wasn't waiting for an answer and he knew it. He sniffled and climbed up the stairs to the bathroom. The hamper was full. His shoulders fell and he pulled on the string to remove the bag from the basket, enclosing the dirty clothes in before moving to his kids' rooms in search of more piles he knew he'd find there.

Nate's room - his old room - was always very clean and he only found a jacket on his desk chair that he left there. He didn't find anything in Julie's room either. She was messy but she did put her clothes in the hamper everyday. Shelley's however was another story. Even at almost thirteen she still didn't know how to clean. It was driving Jezebel insane! He sighed, staring at the clothes, dolls, cushions and books scattered all over the room. He took a few dolls and set them back in the trunk, books on the shelves, and pushed the clothes into the bag he was holding, the dust making him cough. Something shiny suddenly caught his attention on the bed and he frowned, looking harder. It was a magazine, torn at the corners, its cover half hidden by the bed sheet. He removed it with a gesture of his hand and sucked in a deep breath. It was the same magazine he had seen on display at the bookstore. His frown deepened. He put the bag of clothes down and took the magazine with trembling fingers. He loved Will but he didn't like the idea of a magazine with pictures of him half naked in his daughter's room.

The magazine easily opened on a double page of Will, as if used to being parted there. It was an interview with text and pictures. On most of them, Will was shirtless, his toned and tattooed torso in full view. He was smoking a cigarette, playing with his hair. The pictures were beautiful. But then again, Will was beautiful, with his golden skin and eyes so green they could have damned souls.

"I want people to be safe and happy," an extract of the interview read.

He skimmed over the article. Will was talking about his activism and approach to sex and society. He was also talking about himself and his life.

"I never wanted to be a porn star! It was all chance! If you had told me years ago that I would end up in Porn, I would have been disgusted and probably called you crazy!"

Mike swallowed, looking at Will, remembering.

"Porn made me. It revealed me to myself."

He remembered the words, the arguments. He remembered Will's refusal to listen. He remembered the first time Will told him he'd found a new job to pay for his studies. Something fun, he said, and Mike couldn't have disagreed more.

His eyes fell on a paragraph about his fights against teen pornography.

"I arrived at the studio and there was this name on the board that I didn't know. When I went on set, there was a boy - clearly underaged - waiting, already naked. I was supposed to fuck him. And when I asked the director how old this boy was, he told me that it didn't matter. It did. It really did. Teenagers have no place in the industry. I don't understand how can any adult find that hot. It's disgusting and I fear for those guy's children. There's something inherently wrong in the way we diabolize sex and fantasize on youth."

Mike smiled. Will was the strongest person he knew and he fought hard for his convictions. He had done so much for teenagers, especially for queer ones. He intervened in schools to educate about safe sex, gave conferences, had a YouTube channel where he posted educational videos on sexuality, consent and gender equality. He also had a mailbox teenagers could use for advice and he knew Will always answered. He helped kids victims of rape and harassment, had even founded an association so they could find a temporary shelter. He was a great person. And Mike truly admired him.

His chest heaved with a surge of emotion as he touched one of the pictures, tracing the curves of Will's beautiful face fondly.

"Dad?"

The voice forced him back to reality and he turned to see his daughter standing in the doorway, her lips extended in a grimace of confusion, showing her braces. She looked like Nancy, with her long chestnut hair. But she had her mother's nose.

"What are you doing in my room?" she asked.

He let the magazine fall against his side, taking a breath to regain composure.

"I'm doing the laundry. And this is not a room. This is a vortex of entropy."

She rolled her eyes, "Whatever! Don't be in my room!"

He gave her a pointed look, lifting the magazine up again for her to see.

"Where did you get that?" he asked.

She shrugged, "Why do you care?"

He sighed. Teenagers. How was he supposed to say it? It was so awkward. Things were a lot easier when their only concern was to run down the stairs on a skateboard.

"Look, Shelley," he began, scratching his head to find appropriate words, "I'm not mad or anything. You can read the magazines you want. Just, please tell me you didn't buy it because Will is in it? I mean, I wouldn't be... mad... if you did. Just, he's your godfather... So, it's kind of... you know," he explained painfully with a grimace of embarrassment.

"Ew, dad! Gross! He's old!" she answered, wrinkling her nose in disgust.

"Well, for you maybe. But he's not that old!" Mike said, not

appreciating being called old indirectly. They were the same age after all.

"Still dad, it's gross! I just wanted to read the article on Nina Dobrev. She plays in the *Vampire Diaries* and I love her."

He furrowed his brow, looking at the cover with confusion. It did mention an article on *Vampire Diaries* page 16. He swallowed, feeling stupid.

"Oh."

"Can you please go now?" his daughter asked impatiently.

He snapped back to his senses and nodded, his hand tightening around the bag, heading back toward the corridor. She closed the door behind him and he stayed unmoving for a few seconds, thoughts racing in his head before climbing down the stairs to the laundry room.

He joined his wife in the kitchen half an hour later, leaving the dirty clothes to the care of the washing machine. She was already preparing dinner.

"What are you making?"

"Roasted chicken and potatoes," she turned to him, "They eat potatoes, right? I know they're both super annoying with their diet."

Mike rolled his eyes, "Yes, they eat potatoes!"

He took a beer from the fridge.

"A beer?" she asked with a frown, "Really, Mike?"

He shrugged, uncapping the bottle.

"You put on weight," she said, eyeing him from head to toe with a pout, "Will and Ravi are annoying with their diet but you should listen to them a bit more! At least, they look good!"

"They're porn stars! Of course they're gonna look good! I don't have

thousands of guys jerking off on my picture! So what's the point?!" he took a sip from his beer.

She looked at him with squinted eyes, hands on her hips.

"But you do have a wife who wants to be with a man. Not an ape!"

He rolled his eyes, "I'm not that fat!"

"You're not *fat* but you have a few pounds to shed! And drinking beer isn't going to help!"

He shrugged, lips clamping the bottle neck, sucking on the bitter liquid absentmindedly.

"Where is Nate?" he suddenly asked, looking around him as if the utensils and roasting potatoes held all the answers, "He should be home by now."

"He's with his friend Jessie. They had a project to work on."

Mike frowned, thinking. He wanted to ask the question. But he knew Jezebel wouldn't be receptive and he was too tired to fight. He took a long sip of his beer, watching her put the chicken breasts in the oven.

"Don't look at me like that," she said, annoyed, "Set the table!"

He sighed and nodded, dragging his feet to the cabinet, his lips glued to his beer. He grabbed a couple of plates from the shelves, the ones they used all the time, plain and white, when Jezebel stopped him with a screech.

"Not those ones!"

His hand stilled on the third plate and he swallowed back a sigh.

"Take your mom's!" she said.

He frowned, opening his mouth in confusion.

"Really?"

"Yes. Really," she answered, returning to her chicken.

He rolled his eyes, putting the plates he was holding back on their shelf.

"It's ridiculous," he muttered, "They're porn stars. Not Kings!"

"And yet Will's jeans are more expensive than this whole house. I don't want us to pass for poverty-stricken slobs!"

"We're not poverty-stricken! We earn like an average American family!"

"With those plates you were gonna use? It would have been *A night at the Wheelers* by Charles Dickens! I'm already serving them food for the poor, make at least an effort on the presentation!"

"Ridiculous!" he mumbled again, finishing the last of his beer before crossing the arch to the dining room.

It was always the same! Whenever Will and Ravi visited, she always had to make a scene! Now it was the food, but later it would be their appearance and the cleaning of the house to the gutter. The same insufferable drama for the past fifteen years. He shook his head to himself, opening the doors of the china cabinet and took a pile of the hand painted plates he had inherited from his great grandmother. They only used them for special occasions. Christmas, birthdays, weddings. And when Will and Ravi came. So approximately four times a year.

Still annoyed by his wife's antics, he began to set the table, sniffing and looking at himself. Yes, he had taken a few pounds. He knew that. And so what? It's not like he had anyone to impress anymore.

The doorbell chimed a bit after 7 and Mike rushed to open. He was overexcited, way more than a forty year-old married man should have been seeing his childhood friend and he knew it. Not that he cared. He hadn't seen Will in more than three months and he missed him dearly. He tore the door from its inches impatiently and a man appeared in the frame. A beautiful man, ageless, with bronze-colored hair and sparkling green eyes. He was smiling at Mike, flashing perfectly white teeth and Mike felt his heart sink to the bottom of his stomach. He swallowed the gulp stuck in his throat for hours and

enclosed the man in an embrace of steel, pressing their bodies together.

"I've missed you so much," he whispered, rubbing his cheek against Will's like two animals from the same pack recognizing each other.

Will hugged him back, his hands touching his back.

"Me too," he whispered.

The sound of heels pushed them apart. Jezebel was looking at them from the corner with the expression of a hawk. She was wearing the black dress she always wore to go with the china plates, her blond hair loose, eyes and lips colored with light makeup.

"Hi Will," she said softly.

"Hi Jezebel."

They hugged.

"Are you alone?" she asked, pulling away.

"Ravi's coming. He just had something to do before. He'll be here soon," he produced a bottle from his side, "Here."

It was a French wine. And just by its look and date, Mike knew this wasn't a bottle they could have afforded even after a year of saving. Something Jezebel would pester him endlessly with.

"Thank you, Will."

Will removed his jacket and put it next to Mike's and Mike swallowed. He was dressed in casual, a simple blue shirt and jeans that made quite the contrast with Jezebel's reception dress and Mike's washed out suit. And yet, even in such a modest outfit, Will looked classier than both of them which wasn't surprising from someone who could earn gazillions of dollars only naked. He was taken from his thoughts by a sudden burst of thunder that roared through the hall, making the walls tremble. Turning to check behind him, he saw that the thunder had chestnut braided hair and jumped from the last stair right onto Will.

“Will!”

“Hey, Julie!” he lifted her up, making her spin and she giggled. Mike smiled in spite of himself, “How are you doing, my little darling?”

“Good!” she said laughing, her arms in the air as if pretending to be a plane.

Will set her back on her feet and she handed him the necklace, pushing it into his face.

“I made that for you!” she said proudly, “There’s one for Ravi too. My teacher said that I shouldn’t be making necklaces for men because necklaces are for girls but since you’re gay and you kiss boys I supposed it’s kind of the same!”

“Julie!” Mike immediately reprimanded her, “Don’t say stuff like that! It’s homophobic!”

“Oh Mike!” Jezebel muttered, rolling her eyes.

Will smiled, taking the necklace and kneeling to be at her level, “Thank you sweetie,” he said softly, “It’s very nice. You’ll give the other to Ravi, ok?”

She nodded happily and he ruffled her hair. She went off, replaced by Shelley who made her entrance, greeting Will warmly.

They continued to the lounge and took seats on the sofa and armchairs around the coffee table covered in various appetizers Jezebel had probably been preparing the whole day. As usual, there was too much food.

“How’s your mom?” Mike asked as they both settled into the couch, close by.

“Will, do you want to drink something?” Jezebel interjected.

“A whisky, if you have,” he answered before turning his attention back on Mike, “She’s fine. She was a bit tired with all the hospital trips but she’s ok now. I’ll return to Chicago at the end of the month anyway. I haven’t been able to go as much as I wanted with all the

touring.”

“How has it been going? The touring?”

From the corner of his eye, he saw Jezebel took the bottle of Dead Rabbit from the cabinet, their best bottle of whisky, and pour two slugs into a glass that she slid toward Will.

"Thanks Jez," he said, taking it.

Mike looked at the glass then his wife who was fixing herself a glass of Martini.

"You're not asking me what I want to drink? I want some whisky too!"

"You've drank enough already!"

He rolled his eyes, "I only had one beer!"

"Which you really didn't need!"

"I'm fine!" he said, exasperated.

She turned to Will, hands on her hips.

"Tell him, Will! Tell him he put on weight and needs to cut down on sugar and alcohol for a little while!"

Mike sighed. He hated it when she did that, when she used Will against him. Will chuckled, looking at them both with a little smirk.

"He could come run with us," he proposed.

"All the way from Hawkins?" Mike replied.

"Yeah. You take the plane from Indianapolis and in - what? - two hours you're in New York, joining us for our Sunday jog! Easy peasy!"

"Sure! I'll do that!" Mike laughed. Will winked at him and Mike felt a knot form in his gut. He turned to Jezebel instead, "Jez?!"

She huffed, "Fine, fine!" and grabbed a glass, pouring the same

amount of whisky as she had for Will, "Here, have your whisky!"

He took it, "Thanks!"

"Oh, don't thank me! I'm not the one who'll die of cirrhosis!"

Beside them, Julie and Shelley sent each other a knowing look that didn't go unnoticed by any of the adults. Will smirked, shaking his head a bit. Mike brought the glass to lips, swallowed a sip and turned to Will again, ignoring Jezebel who was passing the tray of appetizers rather insistently, playing housewife as she had been taught to.

"Later, mom!" Shelley whined, "You've already proposed me three times in a minute!"

"Fine, you don't need to be rude!"

She proposed the tray to Julie who took a canoppy. Will took one too with a gentle nod. Mike dismissed her with a glare, waiting for the silence to return so that he could finish his conversation with his best friend.

"So, this tour?" he asked again, "How did it go?"

Will licked the crumbs from his lips and Mike's eyes darted up and down, following the movement of his tongue. A reaction Will seemed not to notice.

"Good, good," he said, "I finished my last conference yesterday. It was a very interesting three weeks. Got to meet loads of nice people."

"Weren't you harassed too much?" Jezebel asked, presenting the tray again to Shelley who probably wished she could turn her mother to stone by the sheer force of her eyes.

He shook his head, "No. Most people are very nice. They're here to educate themselves on specific topics. Sure, you always have one insistent fan or two but usually, I turn them down and they go without a problem."

He didn't say more. He never talked about his job in front of children and always remained as evasive as possible. At the same moment, the

doorbell rang and Will uncrossed his legs.

“It must be Ravi,” he said.

Jezebel nodded and disappeared in the hallway to open the door. A few seconds later, a boy with black unruly hair and a leather jacket burst into the room. It wasn’t Ravi. It was Nate, Mike’ son, coming back home from God knew where.

“Hi everyone,” he said.

Mike blinked and jumped off the couch as if about to pounce on his son like a wolf.

“Where have you been?” he asked in a growl.

The boy didn’t react. He was staring at his father with a small frown of confusion and a pout, shaking his head to remove the dark bangs from his eyes. He was the spitting image of Mike at the same age. The same black hair. The same dark eyes. The same freckles. The same tall, gangly form. The same explosive temper. They could have been clones. It was almost unsettling.

“I asked you a question,” Mike insisted, gripping his glass of whisky in his fist.

The teenager’s frown deepened. He sniffled and took a few chips from the bowl on the coffee table, popping them into his mouth with an air of defiance. Mike flared his nostrils, red in the face.

“I told you, Mike,” Jezebel intervened, “He was at Jessie’s.”

Mike didn’t pay his wife any heed and kept his attention locked on his son.

“You could have sent us a text! Do you know what time it is?!”

He was fuming already. On his left, Will put his hand on his arm to calm him.

“Mike...” he whispered soothingly and Mike’s body began to shake from the burning touch, tingling all over.

Jezebel eyed her husband menacingly, "He did send me a text!" she said, defending her son before Mike's anger became a nuisance to her pristine dinner party.

"And you didn't tell me?"

"I told you! I told you he was at Jessie's! Not my fault you don't listen!"

The air was thick enough to cut with a knife. The two girls shook their heads with a grimace. Father and son were staring at the other like two bulls ready to charge, Jezebel in between, acting as a shield. Will wasn't moving from the couch, observing the situation from afar, sipping on his whisky.

"Please, enough you two," she whispered, "We have guests."

Mike sighed and returned to sit with a last glare at his son who glared back before turning to Will, his defiant expression replaced by a smile and a blush he was trying not to show too much.

"Hi Will."

Will moved from the couch to hug Nate warmly.

"Hey kid! It's good to see you! I swear you're even taller than the last time I saw you! Soon, you'll be taller than your dad!"

Mike choked on his drink but they ignored him.

"Sorry for the grand entrance," Nate apologized.

Will shook his head, "It's fine. Don't worry about it!"

Nate's smile widened and so did the pink hue on his cheeks. Jezebel fixed her untouched canopies, presenting the tray again, and Mike groaned in his glass of whisky.

The doorbell rang a second time.

"Ah," Jezebel said, "This time it must be Ravi."

She went off in a clicking of heels. The voice of a man rose in the hall, apologizing for being late, short of breath, sounding absolutely panicked. They all chuckled. Yes, this was Ravi. A few seconds later, she returned to the lounge with a tall bearded man with jet black hair and olive skin dressed in a black vest and light blue jeans.

"Hi," he said in a thick English accent, "I'm so sorry for being late," he went to peck Will on the lips, "Hey babe."

"Did you find the paprika your mom wanted?" Will asked.

Ravi nodded, "Yes, with much difficulty."

"Paprika?" Mike repeated.

Ravi nodded, "Every year it's the same thing. My mum wants me to bring her a special sort of Paprika with honey that she uses for cakes. And I can only find it in a small Paki store in Chicago."

"And not in England?"

"Not this one. And she wants this one. Not any other. And when she wants something, she'll pester you until she gets it."

He sat in one of the armchairs, looking positively exhausted.

"Do you want something to drink?" Jezebel asked softly.

"An ice cold beer would be wonderful!"

She turned to Shelley, currently playing on her phone. Her sister had disappeared and Nate slumped into a chair with a glass of milk, looking at the couples with rebellious disinterest.

"Shelley, can you get a beer from the fridge for Ravi?"

The teenage girl sighed but obeyed, pushing on her feet to get off the couch and go to the kitchen. The adults began to chat, Mike asking Ravi about his trip, accepting canopies from Jezebel who would have probably murdered them all if they hadn't. Nate put his empty glass on the table and licked his lips, eyes glued on Will.

"Will," he tried, his voice wavering with hesitancy, "Do you have a minute? I need your opinion on something."

Will swallowed and put his glass on the coffee table, uncrossing his legs.

"Sure thing, kiddo."

He followed the teenager out of the room. Jezebel immediately arched her brow at her husband expectantly, looking between Mike and the pair disappearing upstairs with an absurd expression. Mike frowned, shook his head and shrugged, ignoring her to respond to Ravi who accepted the beer from Shelley.

Meanwhile, Nate led Will to his room, feeling a little nervous. He had made sure to clean it well, just in case. He didn't want to pass for a slob, especially not in front of Will. He licked his lip and went to fetch something from behind his desk.

"Here," he said, producing a huge canvas, "It's a project for art class but I'm lost on the color palette. What would you choose?"

He put the canvas on the floor for Will to judge and see. It was a sketch of a deformed skeletal silhouette, its huge mouth wide open in a silent scream, the shape of a smaller silhouette pushing against its skin from the inside, as if trying to escape.

"What's the theme?" Will asked.

"Individuality," Nate answered.

Will smirked, "Looks painful."

Nate shrugged and waited as Will examined the drawing, tracing the contours with his fingers.

"You're into surrealism, eh?" he noted, "It's good. Pretty good."

The compliment went straight to Nate's heart and he bit his lip awkwardly.

"You really think so?"

“Yeah. I like it. What colors are you gonna use?”

“I was gonna go on yellow and green but I’m not sure. I’m afraid that might be too nightmarish.”

“Isn’t it the tone you want to set?”

Nate nodded with a shrug.

“Yellow and green sound good to me,” Will continued, “But lighter on the green. And don’t hesitate to insist on the contours with black to give it as much relief as possible. Adding shades of grey could be nice too,” he pointed at the figure, “Here and all around here, to make it a bit of a shadow.”

“Yeah, that’s cool. I like the idea!” Nate agreed, smiling at the man who smiled back, “Thanks.”

“My pleasure. But it’s very good. You’re very talented!”

Nate blushed in spite of himself, happy that Will enjoyed his hard work, and put the canvas back in its hidden place before his mother found it and gave him Hell about it - she only liked paintings with flowers and ladies in fancy dresses and if she ever saw the dark pieces he drew, she would send him either to the priest or a therapist. He didn’t really know which.

“Do you still draw?” he asked Will who was looking about the room, hands buried in the pockets of his jeans. A gesture so casual for most but that gave Will an air of sophistication that always made Nate’s heart beat too fast.

Will turned to look at him with a small smirk.

“Yes I do. In my leisure time. Drawing will always be a part of me.”

“Will you show me some of your work someday?”

Will smiled at him, “Sure! There are stuff you might like.”

Nate’s lips stretched to his ears, his heart hammering in his chest joyfully, palms sweaty with too much emotion. At the same moment,

Jezebel's voice rose into the corridor, calling them to dinner. Nate sighed and followed him down the stairs with a pang of disappointment. She was waiting for them at the bottom and immediately assaulted Will to know if he ate potatoes. When he answered that he did, she softened up, all smiles, and they gathered around the table, Mike opening a good bottle of wine. As usual, there was too much food and she insisted to fill everyone's plate to the fullest.

"Will you return to England soon?" she suddenly asked Ravi, turning to look at him across the table.

Ravi swallowed his bit of chicken and wiped the corners of his mouth with his napkin, "We're going back for Aid-el-Fitr. We'll be staying in Liverpool for about a week, I think."

"Summer vacation in England, the dream!" Will ironized and his boyfriend glared at him.

"Please ignore Will," Ravi said, "He's bitter because he'll have to cohabit with my uncle Salim. They're great friends!"

"What's wrong with your uncle?" Mike asked, cutting Julie's meat in her plate.

"He's an old pig," Will spat.

"Translation," Ravi clarified with an amused smile, "He and Will don't have the same moral standards."

"He's a seventy-eight year-old pervert married to a girl almost forty years younger!" Will interjected, "She was barely legally an adult when he married her!"

"Good gracious!" Jezebel whispered, her hand stilled on her glass of wine.

Ravi sighed, "Unfortunately, the legal age to marry in my parent's country is fifteen. Iman was sixteen. So she was of age."

"Legal or not, it doesn't change the fact that it's repulsive," Will continued with a grimace, "Something must be going terribly wrong

in your head if you're an adult and you marry a kid!"

"Again my love, different cultures here! Not too long ago, may I remind you that kings and queens were betrothed in the crib!"

Will dismissed Ravi's comment with a gesture of his hand, as if removing the words from the air. Silence returned for a little while as they ate and drank.

"You don't think two people with an age difference can love each other and be happy?"

Nate's question was so genuine, it surprised everyone and they all looked up from their plate to stare at him. His eyes were glued on Will with an indescribable expression.

Will blinked.

"Depends on the age gap," he answered slowly, "A few years is ok, I guess. If the two persons are already both adults then why not. But here, it's a kid with someone much, much older. Someone old enough to be their grandfather almost. It's unacceptable."

"Yeah, it's gross," Shelley said, looking at her brother as if he were an anomaly.

Nate shrugged, "Maybe this one case is. But not all."

He went back to sulking, looking stubbornly into his plate. For a long minute, all eyes were on him. Only Julie remained oblivious of the world, playing with the food on her plate. She was too small to understand what was happening around her anyway. Mike brusquely changed the subject, proposing more wine and Jezebel pushed the plate of chicken and potatoes toward Will again. The rest of the dinner went rather smoothly, the adults all chatting energetically with each other, most of them trying to politely decline Jezebel's insistence to fill their plates a fourth time. Nate was still staring down with the expression of a prisoner, regularly looking at Will and Ravi with sad eyes none of them seemed to have noticed.

After they all had their share of an enormous homemade strawberry cake, Jezebel disappeared upstairs to put Julie to bed and Shelley

followed them. Mike launched a playlist of old rock music and produced some Brandy Ravi had offered them years ago from the cabinet. He filled three small glasses. Nate could have gone to his room but for some reason he chose to stay with the three men, wallowed in the couch, eyes glued on his phone while Ravi, Mike and Will kept chatting about politics and life projects.

“About that,” Ravi said, “We’ll stay at Islavadora in July and with Will we were wondering if you guys wanted to tag along? The house is big enough!”

This was a huge understatement. Islavadora was their own private island between Cuba and the Floridian coast, home of a huge Spanish villa they used as a vacation house. Many parties happened there and not exactly children friendly. Mike was even sure some of their movies had been shot in those rooms and by the pool. He shuddered just thinking about it.

He swallowed his gulp, about to answer, but Nate beat him to it before he had even time to open his mouth.

“Oh say yes, dad!” he said excitedly, “Say yes!”

Mike glared at him and turned to Ravi, “Why not! I’ll ask Jez about it.”

Nate pulled a face and crossed his arms on his chest, “Sure, do that. She’ll say no!”

Mike sighed, “Nate, I can’t make a decision for the whole family without asking the approval of the other head of this family. You know that.”

“You’re the man of the house,” Nate grumbled, “You should be the one making the decisions!”

“Hey!” Will reprimanded with a small tap, “Not cool, kid! Not cool at all. Your mom is just as entitled to make the decision for your family as your dad!”

Nate bit his lip and looked down in shame. He hated it when Will was mad at him for something. There was a moment of silent tension

before Ravi decided to speak again and ease the situation as he could.

“Anyway, know that you are all very welcome!”

“Thanks Ravi.”

The man nodded with a gentle smile and left the couch to go outside for a smoke. Nate followed him, apparently in need of some air as well. At the same moment, the song that was currently playing - an old Black Sabbath song - finished. After a few seconds of transition, the next one began and Mike's heart missed a beat. He could have recognized those riffs even in a coma. He rose from the couch and walked toward the fireplace, the first chords of *King of the Fools* filling his soul and heart and brain. As he let the surge of emotions overflow his brain, he felt Will's presence behind him and froze, his heart in the back of his throat, pounding in his head. Will's lips touched his ear, his breath damp and hot, and he began to sing along with Dee Snider.

*"Look around me, all I see
Thousands of faces, wanting me
How can I lead
How can I rule
When I'm the King of the Fools"*

The lyrics made even more sense now than they ever did before, which was particularly ironic. Will's body was pressed against Mike's back and Mike thought he was going to faint.

*"What kind of kingdom has no throne
No crown or castle do I own
I don't have silver, gold or jewels
Yet, I'm the king
King of the fools"*

He began to shake. Will's hands closed on his shoulders to ground him and he felt his body vibrate and float, closing his eyes.

*"And I can't help believing
The world is on my side
No, I can't help believing in my heart"*

*But, I can't stop this feeling
That I should run and hide
So, before I die
I'll sit and wonder why"*

Will slipped his fingers slowly in his, joining their hands on this song that had been theirs and Mike remembered. He remembered all the whispers and promises. He remembered the dreams and the burning passion. He remembered into his flesh and his body arched up against Will's pelvis, mimicking the old dance it had performed so many times in the past, pulsing, breathing, wanting. He remembered who he was.

*"The outside world can't understand
Just who we are or what I am
Well, we don't want their life or rules
I'll be the king, king of the fools"*

He sucked a breath. Will was almost kissing his neck. Almost. Because he wasn't. It was mostly Mike losing himself, wanting things that he thought gone.

When Jezebel returned, she found the two men entangled into one another by the fireplace, eyes closed, rocking to this god awful song. She hated Twisted Sisters. Positively hated them. But her husband loved that band and their looks and their hair and their music. It was the band of his teenage years. The years that never existed to her. The years she never wanted to hear about again. But looking at the father of her children, wantonly pressed up into another man's body - especially this man and all there was about him - she felt suddenly ill and couldn't help but be brutally reminded of the truth. Will's arms had almost encircled Mike's waist. They were oblivious to the rest of the world, as always when they were together.

The door behind her clicked and laughing voices rose. She turned to the glued pair and cleared her throat before anyone else saw them like this. The last thing she wanted was for her son to be a witness of this distasteful show. The father's sins had already made enough damage to add more confusion to the poor boy's troubled mind. They snapped back to reality, as if suddenly remembering where they were and it looked painful, especially for Mike who had the expression of a

dazed comatose.

Nate and Ravi entered the room again and she took advantage of the distraction to turn the music off and shut down all unwanted memories, forcing them back to the present, to the only reality there would ever be.

Will shook his head, pulling away from Mike and Mike felt cold.

“It’s getting late, babe,” Ravi said, “We should go.”

Will nodded with a swallow. Mike’s heart constricted in his chest. Ravi hugged Jezebel goodbye, telling her the food was delicious and she cooed. Will and Mike exchanged a look and embraced each other tight.

“You’ll tell me for July, ok?” Will whispered against his cheek.

Mike nodded, “I promise.”

“It’d be awesome to see you.”

“Yeah, it would.”

The embrace seemed to last indefinitely. Eventually, the two men parted and it seemed they had left a piece of themselves stuck to the other. Ravi bid Mike goodbye and Will turned to Nate.

“You’ll send me a text when your project is over?”

Nate smiled, “Sure!”

Will smiled back, “Good.”

He ruffled the kid’s hair as a goodbye and Nate’s heart beat against his rib cage painfully. He wished he had had a hug too.

After the door had closed behind the couple, the house was deadly silent again. Nate went upstairs and Mike joined his wife to help her clean, ignoring the knots in his stomach at the thought that he wouldn’t be seeing Will again before a few weeks. Distance was always so very painful. Even thirty years later.

Nor the wife nor the husband exchanged words for long minutes. Jezebel was cleaning the kitchen while Mike loaded the dishwasher in heavy silence. He didn't need to ask to know she was mad.

Silence accompanied them to bed. Mike wasn't very tired but if he lingered in the dining room alone, it would only make it worse. As expected, the moment they slipped under the sheets, she began to kiss and touch him. To reassure herself or claim him back maybe. Mike's body remained impassive and he wiggled his hips away from her too hungry mouth, as if burned.

"Not tonight, Jez," he said, "I'm tired."

He felt her tense against him for a second and she moved to her side.

"Of course... You're never in the mood after you've seen him."

He sighed, "Please don't start. It's late and I'm tired."

"You're always tired."

"Please don't."

The light switched off as they both laid in oppressive silence, their bodies not touching. He closed his eyes and tried to convey happy, comforting thoughts. A messy dorm covered in posters, a concert, hidden kisses in closed booth. Half returned to images of the past, he heard Jezebel get off the bed and go to the bathroom to take her pills. He wanted to feel bad but was locked inside his own body and brain, oblivious to the pain of others. Oblivious to the fact that in the room that used to be his, a fifteen year-old boy was happily dreaming with the hope of spending an entire month in the house of the one he adored.

And Mike fell asleep, hugging his pillow.

2. The Dali exhibition

Summary for the Chapter:

"He was etching to add a heart. He really, really wanted to. But he figured it might have been seen as inappropriate. Or not. Will was so oblivious when it came to the true nature of his feelings that he could tell him he loved him and Will would only smile, saying "me too, kiddo" and ruffle his hair like an old dad. It was unnerving. But right now, Nate was so happy that he didn't care. He was spending the weekend with Will! His parents could bicker at each other about his sexuality for as long as they wanted, right now, life was beautiful."

Notes for the Chapter:

Hey there! Here's the new chapter!
It's quite long! When I was finished writing it I was having a headache haha!

Hope you'll enjoy it!

Nathaniel Wheeler was a fifteen year-old teenager like any other. He lived in a house in a small town in rural Indiana, had parents who only married out of convenience rather than actual love, went to the same schools his dad paraded when he was his age, wondered about the point of life daily, watching his mother clean her house more than she talked to her husband and his father drag his feet every morning to a job he hated. He also had two sisters that he sort of tolerated, a pre-teen obsessed with her braces and a blonde pixie who behaved more like a fire alarm than an actual 7 year-old. As far as he was concerned, teaching Julie to talk had been his parent's biggest mistake but for a reason he couldn't quite understand, they didn't agree with him and said it was part of her development. He was a rather quiet boy and preferred keeping to himself, reading or working on his art than braving groups of teenagers he didn't share anything with. Noise and crowded places made him anxious. His mother said he had social phobia but he wasn't too sure. He mostly found kids his

age shallow and unworthy of his time. He enjoyed the company of older people more. His friend Jessy was in College. He majored in Art, Nate's favorite subject. It always had a special place in his art and was his link to his favorite person in the world.

Because, you see, Nate had a secret. He was in love - soulmate level in love - with the most beautiful, most admirable man ever. The only problem was that this man he loved so much was *way* out of his reach. It wasn't so much the gender as the identity of the man in question as well as the age gap. Will Byers. His father's forty year-old best friend and sister's godfather. It also happened that his man, almost three times his age, was a porn star, something his religious mother had a very hard time tolerating. She did, for her husband's sake but Nate knew what she really thought of his career choice. And Will was a Superstar, giving interviews for the most famous magazines and talk shows and recognized everywhere he went. He wasn't an average porn actor who did drugs and weird movies. No, Will was an aesthete, turning love making on camera into an art form made of colors and dancing bodies. He was an activist and a humanitarian and did a lot for the LGBT community and teenagers.

Nate didn't identify as gay. He didn't even know if he was gay at all. He loved Will and wanted Will. Only him. He had been in love with that perfection of a man for as long as he could remember. But Will was forty, in a very long term relationship with a guy Nate appreciated and respected a lot and didn't see in young Nate a potential lover. Not to mention that Will led the strictest policy regarding underage sex and had the deepest repulsion for relationships with an age difference as important as theirs. The man was vocal enough about it in his interviews and that sucked. Nate would have given anything for his beloved to see him and acknowledge him. He wasn't a baby anymore. He knew how life worked and what he wanted. And he wanted to be with Will, in every possible way. The only person who knew of his dirty little secret was his best friend, Jessy in whom Nate confided everything.

Bored on his bed in the confinement of his bedroom, he grabbed his laptop from the chair nearby and dragged it towards his lap, opening it. He went to check his Twitter and scrolled down his feed. He didn't follow many people. But he followed Will and Will was very active

on Twitter, with more than 72 million followers. He posted messages of hope and acceptance for the LGBT kids, tips, advice and of course, photos and videos. The last one had been posted a few hours before. It was a video featuring one of his conferences.

Nate licked his lip and clicked on play.

Will was on stage, dressed in a black casual outfit, his bronze hair meticulously combed. He looked real good and he knew it. The man was radiating confidence. He cleared his throat and tapped into his mic to test it. When he was satisfied with the sound, he began to talk to the audience.

“Good afternoon everyone,” he said in the mic, “Thank you for being here today.”

People in the audience started yelling in name.

“Thank you,” he said again, chuckling.

He waited for the room to be calm again and continued. Nate was watching with rapt attention.

"For those who don't know me, my name is Will - Will Byers - and I've been working in the porn industry for the past eighteen years. I'm a porn actor and porn director, specialized in queer Independent adult films. I know you've been following workshops all day and had many other interventions from other activists, from the porn industry or else, and I wanted to talk to you about something that is very important to me. Especially now, in the world we live."

“I fell in the porn industry when I was twenty two. By total chance. It was never something I thought I'd do. As a teenager, I wanted to illustrate comic books. But porn? Never thought of it! I mean, porn actors are perverts, right! They have sex with people on TV! It's gross!”

The audience laughed. Nate chuckled at his screen, drinking into Will's beauty.

Will continued, “And things were different back then. There was no Internet and the porn industry was very secluded. You didn't have

YouPorn and porn magazines were very difficult to find! Today, sex injunctions are everywhere. On TV, magazines, social media. Everywhere people are encouraged to have always more sex, experiment more practices with always more partners. And all the porn you can find so easily certainly doesn't help."

"Let's be clear, being a porn actor for almost twenty years, I'm obviously not anti-porn! Far from it. I actually think that porn can be empowering. I mean, I love my job. I love doing porn and I wouldn't change it for any other. But I'm talking of a good kind of porn here, healthy, responsible and that doesn't thrive on sexism and abuse. I've actually given many conferences on the topic. You can find all those conferences online on my website, Twitter and my channel on YouTube if you're interested."

He grabbed the bottle from the chair and took a sip of water before continuing.

"Today, I wanted to talk about the notion - and importance - of consent. We went from a culture of sexual abstinence to sexual abundance. With the Internet, it's so easy to find all sorts of sex. I remember the time when I had to negotiate for weeks just for a poor magazine featuring shirtless men! My God! All my pocket money went for that magazine! Now, in just a click, all your wildest, most forbidden fantasies, play before you. Awesome, right?! No. Not awesome. Because this abundance of easily accessible sex brings another problem forward. I receive tons of emails everyday. Hundreds of them and I do try to read them all. Some of them are quite creative! But many are questions. Lots of questions about sex and sexuality. Especially from teenagers and young adults. And the notion of consent in those emails is very problematic, hence my presence here with you today. The other day, I received an email that said, "Will, I'd like to do anal with my girlfriend, but she doesn't want to let me do it. How can I make her?""

He paused, looking at the people in front of him even though he couldn't see them, his gorgeous green eyes gleaming like two beacons of light.

"Simple answer, you don't. If she doesn't want to do it, then you let it go. She's not entitled to agree to everything you want to do with her

body. And it goes for boys to. It doesn't work like that."

He took another sip of water.

"I'll take an example that I saw online and that I find quite fitting. Let's say, you're with someone and that person wants tea. So, you go to the kitchen and you start preparing the tea. You make the water boil, you take a teabag from the cupboard, you pour the water in the mug with the teabag. But when you return to the room, the person who wanted tea in the first place has fallen asleep. Now, what are you going to do? They're asleep. So you don't know if they still want tea. You can't spill the hot tea on them, right or shake them and force it down their throat. It's rude, you don't do that. You can't be mad at them either for being tired and falling asleep, leaving you alone with the mug of tea. Now, let's say the person drinks the tea you made. Let's say, they wanted green tea to try the taste. But after a sip, they realize they don't like green tea after all, that no, it's yuck, not good. You can't force them to keep drinking green tea just because they thought they'd like it. If they don't like green tea, they stop drinking green tea. Same, if the person is drinking the tea but you can see they don't like it, that they're grimacing or not looking good, you take the mug away from them, asking them what's wrong, making sure they still want to drink the tea. And if they don't, then teatime is over."

He paused to look at the crowd again.

"It's the same for sex. You can't make someone do something they don't want to do with their body. Not ever. Whether it's a girl with a boy, a boy with a girl, a boy with a boy or a girl with a girl. Consent is key to every sort of relationships. Sex is not a free right. It's a contract between willing participants who know the rules of the game before it starts. And it's the parent's job to make sure their kids know that. Because, yes, teenagers watch porn. I'm sorry, parents. It's the hard truth. And instead of shaming them and forbidding, talk to them. Educate them. On the notion of consent and the importance of safe sex. Because the Internet is such a dangerous place for your teenagers to be. It's full of all sorts of sex, most of the time, sexist, unsafe and unhealthy. With actors drugged and treated horribly. With dangerous practices that should never be reproduced at home without proper knowledge and training. Especially not by young people who barely have any experience at all."

"Never forget that communication is the most important part of intimacy. Don't hesitate to look for workshops online on sex. Buy books. Stay safe. Sex can be a lot of fun but you don't do it alone and the person with you matters. And never forget that porn should never be used to teach you sex. Never. I'm especially talking to teenagers here. Be careful what you're seeing online. Don't confuse fantasy with reality. Reality is all you have. Don't ruin it."

"Thank you for your time."

There was a round of applause. Will saluted with a shake of his hand and disappeared into the back. The video stopped. Nate's heart was beating so fast. Will was so perfect. He was such a role model. He loved him so much!

He began to scroll down again the few messages and links Will had posted next, skimming rapidly over the comments. Most were heart emoticons or praises but some were so explicit they turned his ears a deep shade of pink. Sometimes, Will responded playfully but when the poster of a raunchy comment appeared to be underage, he put them back to their place politely but unceremoniously. Nate frowned. How typical of Will. He scrolled down until his cursor reached a photo that took his breath away. It was a shot of Will, bare-chested in a bathroom, his hair still wet, a towel wrapped around his well defined waist. His lips were contorted in a smirk and his eyes shone greener than ever. Nate's body began to tremble and he popped an instant boner. Than man looked hot as Hell.

"Fuck," he muttered.

As expected, the comment section was full of dirty messages. Will being a porn Star, people didn't censor themselves on what they wanted to do that body. Nate could only moan and agree. He was a walking invitation to debauchery. His eyes remained fixed on the picture for long seconds, his body throbbing with the need of him. He was starved. Starved for this man. Knowing that his father had probably fucked that made him so angry and irrationally jealous. Especially when you saw his father. Sure, Mike had looked good as a teenager - Nate was his clone after all - but now? He had more of the pachyderm than the heartbreaker. It was gross. Will was so perfect. Nate would have done anything for a single touch. He swallowed a

gasp. His vision was blurring on Will's powerful torso and tattooed arms. He needed to see more of him. Needed to see what was under that goddam towel! Luckily for him, that missing element was very easy to find. He only had to tap a few words in the search engine. Taking a small gasp, he looked around, making sure his door was closed and his parents away. When he was certain to be absolutely alone, he opened a private browser to feed his vice.

Will Byers pornhub

He swallowed. The first URL led to a video he had already seen countless of times. One of his favorite. Adrenaline rushed to his veins and he began to shake with that familiar dreadful anticipation of the pleasure that was to come.

He clicked on play.

At the very same moment, his father, Mike Wheeler, was going upstairs to ask a question to his son. They were supposed to go out with Jezebel the next day and he wanted to make sure that Nate could babysit his sisters. He was old enough after all. He took the turn and headed to his old room that was now occupied by his son..

It was a short video. No stupid scenario. No cringey dialogue. Only Will, as beautiful as ever, gorgeously naked, being sucked by another guy for three minutes on a bed, his body in full display. Nate's brain shut down, overwhelmed by a massive rush of endorphins that completely took over his mind and senses. He would have given anything to be that guy on his knees with Will's gorgeous cock against his tongue. His mouth filled with saliva. His hand dropped into his pants, his eyes wide and glued on the screen. He moaned at the first contact of his hand on his aching erection, watching Will stroke the guy's hair gently, smirking with that little smirk that made Nate's knees go weak. Nothing could be hotter than this. Nothing. He wasn't going to last very long. His brow furrowed, focused, drinking into Will's face and body. He wondered if he tasted as good as he looked.

On the other side of the corridor, Mike had reached his destination and put his hand on the knob that he turned with a swift gesture of his wrist.

Nate was almost there. He could feel it, the tension rising up, swelling in the pit of his belly. His cheeks were flushed, lips parted as he moved his hand frantically under the covers. On the screen, Will was coming, his features breaking into an expression of sheer wanton bliss. He looked so beautiful. Nate wanted nothing more than to kiss him. Kiss him everywhere. He watched him with wide eyes as his body began to convulse and he came in his screen partner's mouth. Nate moaned too. Unable to hold it any longer. And then...

The door burst open on Mike.

"Nate?!"

The spell broke instantly. It was like receiving a dozen buckets of ice cold water at the same time. Father and son were staring at each other in absolute confusion for the longest second ever. Mike didn't need to ask. The situation was pretty much self-explanatory. The second of daze passed, heat slowly rushed up Nate's cheeks and he hurried to close the lid of his computer, his body throbbing with pain. Mike averted his eyes with his hand.

"Oh my God! I'm sorry!" Mike said, turning away in shame.

"Dad!"

"I'm sorry!" Mike repeated, just as red as his son, "Please, do continue what you were doing," he stuttered awkwardly, "I'll come back when you're finished," he took a step backward before stopping to a halt, "Just, try not to masturbate on anything too weird, ok?" Mike nodded to himself, "Mhh, yeah. Good boy!"

And closed the door, leaving Nate completely frozen and shocked, his heart in the back of his throat. Not anything too weird, uhm? Weirder than jacking off on his childhood best friend who also happened to have played the role of surrogate dad to Nate all his life? He wouldn't have tested the waters to know. One thing was certain though, he no longer was in the mood to masturbate, feeling sick and nauseous.

His father always had to ruin everything!

Mike joined his wife in the dining room, still very shaken by what just happened. He mostly felt bad for Nate. He had ruined his kid's solitary session. And been reminded once again that his baby boy wasn't so much of a baby anymore. He found her fixing the flowers in the vase on the table, her eternal apron secured around her waist. The smell of cooking dough was coming from the kitchen. She had probably baked a cake again.

"What was that?" she asked, "I heard screaming."

Mike let himself fall into the couch with a long sigh.

"Oh nothing! I just walked in on Nate who was busy..."

He didn't say more. It was already sufficiently awkward. Jezebel stilled her hand on the vase with a frown.

"Busy?"

Mike rolled his eyes. His wife could be so clueless sometimes! He wiggled his brow suggestively.

"Well, you know... Busy... Doing some self-discovery!" he didn't even know how to phrase this.

It took her a moment to follow him but when she did, her mouth contorted in a pout of disgust.

"Oh Mike! That is repulsive! Oh God!" she looked ready to be sick.

He shook his head in annoyance, "No, it's not! He's fifteen! It's perfectly natural at his age to do this sort of things!"

"It's Will's fault!" she said.

"Ah! Of course! Something happens in your pants, it's automatically Will's fault! Everybody knows that!"

"I saw one of his *educational videos*! He was encouraging children! Teaching them about masturbation! Children, Mike!"

Mike let go of a sigh, flopping into the armchair with his phone in hand.

“First, they’re not children! They’re teenagers! Second, Will’s not *teaching* anything! He’s only *explaining* to those teenagers how their bodies work. It’s biology. Something all parents should do!” he shook his head, opening his Twitter app mechanically.

Jezebel didn’t partake in his logic, “He even tells them how to practice *anal sex!*” she whispered the words as if they were dangerous curses, “You find that normal?!”

“No, you’re right! They should stay ignorant! Being safe and knowing what you do is overrated! Risking hurting your partner or yourself and smearing shit and blood all over the bed is so much more fun!”

His chest heaved as he took a deep breath to calm his nerves, pressing his finger to check his Twitter feed. He couldn’t see his wife but knew she had stopped cleaning the table to dig burning holes in the back of his skull.

“I don’t want Nate to do that. Not ever.”

“That, my dear, is not your decision to make.”

Mike could feel she wanted to say a lot more. It showed in the way her hand stilled around the rag she was holding and how her features contorted. He waited but she didn’t add anything else, reporting her attention on her table that she began to rub vigorously. Mike rolled his eyes, returning his own attention to his phone. He kept scrolling his Twitter feed down until he came across a photo that froze him to the bones. Will was bare-chested on that picture. Wet and wearing only a towel. The air left his lungs. Jezebel could have spoken again he wouldn’t have heard her. His world had returned to his one constant. That perfection of a man. That perfection of a man he had let go years ago.

Dinner went pretty quiet. Mike and Jezebel were still at odds with each other and Nate hadn’t quite recovered from the shock and embarrassment of his father bursting into his room at the most inappropriate moment. Fortunately, for once he wasn’t saying any

name. He didn't want to imagine his father's reaction if he had. He munched on his zucchini without much enthusiasm, listening to the heavy silence at the table. His phone suddenly buzzed in his pocket and he let go of his fork to check on it.

"Nate!" his mother reprimanded.

Phones weren't allowed during family dinner. Nate didn't care. And seeing who had just contacted him, he cared even less. It was a text from Will. The world around him disappeared and his heart began to hammer in his chest as he double clicked on it to read.

Hey kiddo! I don't know if you're aware but there's a super cool exhibition on Dali happening in Chicago next week-end and I thought that maybe you'd like to go? Let me know and I'll go with you if you want! It's not too far from Hawkins so I'll pick you up and drive you back home, no problem! Will

Will 7.14pm

Nate's lips extended into the happiest of smiles.

"Are you ok?" Shelley asked, looking at her brother as if he were stupid.

He ignored her.

"Dad, can I go see the Dali exhibition next weekend with Will?"

"What exhibition?"

"An exhibition in Chicago. Will just texted me to ask if I wanted to go with him. Please, please say yes! I love Dali! He's a huge source of inspiration for my art class! Please! He says he'll pick me up and drive me back home!"

The kid was so excited, it made Mike chuckle.

"Sure, why not!"

His wife immediately glared at him.

“Awesome! Thanks dad!”

He paid his mother no heed and hurried to text Will back.

**Hey Will,
My dad's ok so YEAH! I'd be super happy to go!**

Nate, 7.16pm

Barely a minute later, Will was already responding.

Perfect! I'll pick you up next Saturday around 11am so we can have lunch with Ravi.

Ok for you?

Will, 7.17pm

Still smiling, he texted back.

Sounds cool!

Nate, 7.18pm

Awesome! Let's do that! See you on Saturday then ;)

Will, 7.18pm

Yeah, see you!

Nate, 7.19pm

He was etching to add a heart. He really, really wanted to. But he figured it might have been seen as inappropriate. Or not. Will was so oblivious when it came to the true nature of his feelings that he could tell him he loved him and Will would only smile, saying “me too, kiddo” and ruffle his hair like an old dad. It was unnerving. But right now, Nate was so happy that he didn't care. He was spending the weekend with Will! His parents could bicker at each other about his sexuality for as long as they wanted, right now, life was beautiful.

Life, for Jezebel Markowski, was awful. She was upset. Upset with

herself but with her husband mostly, as had been the case for the past twelve years. She took a deep sigh and stared at her reflection in the mirror of her white wood vanity table, a brush combing her long sandy blond hair with the same mechanic gestures she repeated every night. Her husband was preparing for sleep in the adjacent bathroom and she could hear the water flow from the faucet as he rinsed his mouth and washed his hands. She blinked, the fingers of her free hand stroking the flower-shaped brooch she inherited from her great grandmother. The brooch was passed from mother to daughter as a wedding gift. It was a family tradition. Was it Polish, she didn't know. She had never even been to Poland once. Only remained old grandpa Wójcik's stories on how his own grandparents immigrated from their village to New York in 1834. But from 1834 onward, every Markowski was born on American soil.

The brooch came from that old village no one remembered. It was supposed to give luck and was a source of pride. She chuckled to herself, turning the small bronze object between her fingers. How did that serve her... Her marriage was a disaster. She knew it, her husband knew it, her friends and family knew it... Even the neighbors gossiped about them. The Wheelers, the happiest couple of Hawkins! It was her dream once. Having received a very Catholic education, she was expected to thrive as a wife and mother and God knew she tried. She even dared to hope for a short while. Of course, Mike was never husband material. She wasn't stupid and knew it the first moment she saw him at that Fair. With a sad smile, she opened the drawer of her vanity and took an old picture out. Her chest heaved as she looked at the young heartthrob in the photograph, smoking a cigarette in his leather jacket, his eyes darkened with eyeliner and nails painted black. How beautiful he was then. Tall and slender. It only took one look to dazzle her, shy, naive Jezebel who had seen in this rebellious man the Prince Charming he would never be. Her parents tried to warn her at first when they saw their daughter with this androgynous boy, rumored to favor the most shameful company. They knew what he was and what laid unspoken in the gentle way he moved his soft-looking hands and battled his dark eyelashes. But then, Jezebel got pregnant and there wasn't much of a debate anymore. Fifteen years later, parents and son-in-law barely exchanged a word and avoided each other during family events. When Jezebel returned to see her parents, she went alone.

Her brow furrowed as she noticed the other picture hidden in the drawer, far in the back. She took it between her thumb and index fingers, her heart beating faster. The colors of the photograph had tarnished a little bit and the corners were torn. It was a small group photo. She and Mike were in their late twenties on this one, smiling at the objective. Baby Nate was only a few weeks old, draped in a baby coverall. In Will's arms. The presence of Will on the photograph brought a sudden anguish to her heart. He was like a ghost haunting their memories and clouding their future. Her couple's shadow, creeping into Mike's every word, every look, every touch, every laugh. A constant reminder of what laid dormant in her husband's heart. A scar that never faded.

He was the Devil to whom Mike sold his soul and the man held it in the crook of his hands, playing with the cords of Jezebel's life. She tried to swallow the lump that formed in her throat, pushing the two pictures back into their drawer. Nathaniel's birth had brought so much hope. He was such a sweet child, kind, polite and caring. She used to stare at him for hours, at his small pink feet and tiny hands, amazed that he was actually real and that she made him. How far did that seem now...

Mike returned to their bedroom, smelling like mint toothpaste.

"You're still upset," he said, letting go of a sigh when she didn't answer, "The kid was so happy to go! I couldn't say no."

"Of course, you couldn't..." she muttered.

"Is this why you're mad? Because I said yes?!"

"No! I just... You could have asked for my opinion, that's all."

Mike looked down, biting his lip, "Will isn't taking Nate to a porn festival, if that's what you're afraid of. It's an art exhibition!"

"I know that!"

"Then where is the problem?"

She shook her head, "There is no problem, Mike. Forget I said anything."

There was a moment of silence. Mike fixed the pillows and put himself to bed. She couldn't help the thoughts from racing inside her head. From the corner of her eye, she saw her husband grab his phone, nestled under the covers.

"What was he... watching?" she asked after a while, swallowing with pain.

Mike looked up with a frown, "What?"

"Nate. When you... disturbed him earlier. What was he watching?"

Mike's attention returned to his phone.

"I don't know that! I didn't step into the room to check! It was already sufficiently awkward for the both of us! I'm an invasive dad but I'm not that invasive. At least, I try not to be."

"You're sure it wasn't Will?!"

"Will?!" Mike exclaimed, looking at his wife with huge eyes.

"Don't be daft, Michael. You must have seen how the boy looks at him!"

"Nate has always had a bit of a crush on Will! But it's all very innocent."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that!"

Mike grimaced, his thumb freezing on the picture of Will in his towel, "Oh! It's gross, Jezebel. You really are looking way too much into this. Will has always been a role model for Nate. I mean, he taught him to draw and how to ride a bike. He babysitted Nate a lot as a young kid and Nate learned a lot from him. If Nate likes men then he must be projecting. It's nothing but puppy love fantasy."

"What if it doesn't stay a fantasy?"

His eyes lifted up from the picture to his wife. At first, his expression was incredulous, looking for signs that she was joking. When he realized she was serious, he burst out laughing.

“Are you serious right now? Are you seriously implying something gross could happen between Will and our son?” he asked with a smirk.

She didn’t blink, “Yes, that’s what I’m implying.”

Mike shook his head, “If Will heard you...”

“What if then?” she insisted.

Mike was silent for a little while, observing her. He couldn't believe what he was hearing.

“Then Nate would have the best lover in the world and a hell of a ride!”

Obviously, it wasn’t what she wanted to hear and she opened her mouth in horror.

“Oh my God! Micheal!”

Mike was still laughing, enjoying her grimace of disgust, “I mean, I should know right?! I remember his worth in bed! And let me tell you that it *was* something! The man didn’t steal his reputation! He’s a pro after all! Nate would have so much fun! I’d be jealous!”

Jezebel was shaking her head, her hand on her mouth to keep her from being sick. Mike cackled a minute more, his eyes gleaming with evil glee, before sobering up, looking at his wife with a deadly expression.

“Do you hear yourself? Do you even realize how ridiculous you sound?! What do you want me to answer to *that*?! Implying that Will could *fuck* our boy... You should be ashamed of yourself. If Will heard you, he’d have his heart broken.”

Jezebel was trembling on her stool, “Mike...”

“Shut up.”

Mike enclosed his focus on the Twitter picture, reading the suggestive comments he could only agree with. He was so angry at his wife, she

didn't even dare say another word again and joined him in the bed, keeping her distance from the cold body beside her.

Someone else had reservations regarding that little rendez-vous and that someone was Jessy McCormick, Nate's best friend. Nate was so excited, he immediately texted his friend to give him the great news. Like Jezebel, Jessy was sensing the trap, only differently.

"It's not a date, Nate," he told him on the phone the next day.

"I know, I know."

"I'm being serious, here. Don't go thinking it's anything romantic because it's not. He doesn't see you like that."

"I know!"

"You sure?"

"Yes."

"You're sure you're not picking a cute outfit to impress him right now?!"

Nate was about to answer when he caught the tight jeans he was holding.

"No, I'm not."

"You're lying."

"Are you spying on me now?"

"I just know you."

Nate flared his nostrils, pushing the jeans back into the drawer.

Jessy continued, "Listen man, I know you're all lovey-dovey for the guy. You know what I think of that but please, don't do anything stupid. He really doesn't fancy you. He sees you like his kid."

“I know.”

“So behave like a kid and not like a creepy old man lover!”

“He’s not old!” Nate vehemently protested.

“He’s the age of your folks! He’s old!”

“He’s perfect!”

He could hear his friend roll his eyes behind his phone, “Here we go again!”

“Oh shut up!”

“I’m serious, Nate. Don’t screw this up.”

“I won’t!”

Saturday arrived quickly. Nate was overexcited. He had been waiting for this day all week. Will’s car parked a bit passed 11am. He was already on the porch, his heart hammerjacking in his chest watching Will emerge from the car, shaking his head to remove rebellious bronze-colored bangs from his forehead, his green eyes glowing behind them. Nate’s breath caught in his throat and he swallowed a shudder.

“Hey Will!” he said, smiling a huge toothy smile.

Will smiled back, “Hey kiddo!”

At the same moment, the door opened on Mike and Will’s attention was immediately refocused on the adult. Jezebel joined them with a scarf that she forced into Nate’s hands before he even had time to protest.

“You were going to forget it again!” she scolded him.

The boy grimaced, “Mom!” he whined, “I don’t want it! I told you! It’s itchy! And it’s not that cold”

She didn't listen, too busy checking her son's coat was zipped, "That's how you get sick!"

"I won't get sick!"

Mike rolled his eyes at the pair, "He's fifteen, Jezebel! Not two!"

Will chuckled watching the family drama from his car, his folded arm resting on the door, "We're going to Chicago, Jez. Not Alaska! I promise I'll keep your pup safe and warm!"

Will's words were innocent. Deep down, Nate knew it. He was only joking with his mother. Parent to parent stuff. Yet, he couldn't help the small tremor in his heart, almost begging Will to act on his words, in the car, at the exhibit, the restrooms... Nate didn't care. He was fine with everything! He gulped, his brain heated up with too much adrenaline. He was so lost in his own unspeakable fantasies that he failed to hear Will call his name.

"Nate?" Will tried again, "Hey kiddo?!"

Nate snapped out of his trance, shaking his head to bury back the burning images of the movie he had watched the day prior with Nate as the lucky protagonist and nodded on empty.

"Shall we?" Will said, gesturing for Nate to join him.

The boy jumped off the porch onto the passenger seat.

"Wave at your mother before she thinks you abandoned her and start crying!" he encouraged with a smirk, waving his own hand through the window, looking into the rear mirror.

Mike and Jezebel waved back, smiling rather stiffly. Will drove off the parkway. Still checking into the mirror, he saw them arguing but couldn't hear what they were fighting about. Beside him, Nate was shaking his head.

"What's up?" Will asked.

"They're always fighting!" he complained.

“They’re your parents. They’re worried for you. My mom was the same.”

Nate snorted, putting the scarf into the back seats. He took a deep breath, looked at the man beside him and began to relax. They drove steadily to Chicago playing their favorite game, a music contest! The point was to play a song and the other had to guess which song it was. For the moment, Will was winning but Nate wasn’t so bad either.

It was Will’s turn to guess which he did the second the music started.

“Oh easy! Maiden, *Hallowed be thy name.*”

“Yes!”

“I love this one. I’m not a huge Maiden fan but the instrumental of this song is amazing.”

Nate nodded and began to sing goofily with the singer, making big gestures with his hands in theatrical fashion.

*“I’m waiting in my cold cell, when the bell begins to chime
Reflecting on my past life and it doesn’t have much time”*

Will chuckling, singing along too.

*“Cause at 5 O’clock they take me to the gallows pole,
The sands of time for me are running low, running looooooow”*

The riffs burst into the car and the two men air-guitared on it.

“I love that part!” Nate said, “It’s orgasmic!”

Will laughed, “Yeah. The chords are dope!”

They let the song play in whole, singing and headbanging on it, laughing at each other. Nate always felt at ease with Will. It wasn’t just the physical attraction. It was so much more than that. When he was around Will, he felt normal, accepted. The song ended. The game was on again. Will licked his lip and pressed the button for the next song. Nate frowned, searching for a title.

“The Cure, *Lullaby*?”

Will nodded, “Yep! I used to listen to this song all the time when I was your age. I just love the way Rob sings on it.”

They let the song play and it was Nate’s turn again.

“My turn!” the boy said happily, putting on the next song. He sounded excited. It was a song he had listened to all week and couldn’t wait to share it with Will.

It’s started rather soft before exploding in the car. Will smirked.

“Brutal!”

“I love that band. I’ve just discovered them. They’re awesome!”

“I like it, yeah.”

“You don’t know?” Nate challenged.

Will shook his head, “Maybe I know the name of the band if you tell me but no, I don’t know that song and I don’t recognize the voice or style.”

“You give up?” Nate asked, poking his tongue out.

Will nodded, “I give up!”

“Motionless in white. *Headache*.”

“It’s good. I like it. Motionless in white, you say?! You have others of them?!”

“Sure!”

Nate beamed. His father found the music horrible. He never liked any of Nate’s favorite songs, criticizing his son’s tastes all the time like the old grinch he was. It wasn’t any fun. He proceeded to play two other songs from the band, his favorites, happy that Will enjoyed them too.

“My turn!” Will said at the end of the third song, “It’s a cover by the

singer of the White Stripes. You know them?”

“Yeah!”

“It’s a live cover of an old country song called *Jolene*. Rings any bell?” Nate shook his head. Will continued, “It’s honestly my favorite cover ever. The guy sings with his guts,” he pushed play, “The audio doesn’t do justice to the live video but it’s still awesome.”

The song began, soft acoustic guitar at first. Nate waited for the explosion of riff but it never came. Instead, a voice rose between the chords, deep and broken and Nate’s blood froze in his veins. Will was right. The guy was singing with his guts. The lyrics immediately reached the boy deep for way too many reasons.

Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene
I'm begging of you please don't take my man
Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene
Please don't take him just because you can

Your beauty is beyond compare
With flaming locks of auburn hair
With ivory skin and eyes of emerald green
Your smile is like a breath of spring
Your voice is soft like summer rain
And I cannot compete with you
Jolene

They didn’t exactly match Nate’s situation but they still called to him in a special way, the second verse particularly and its coincidental description of Will’s beauty.

“What I like with this version,” Will suddenly commented, breaking Nate’s introspection, “It’s that he hasn’t switched gender. Usually when a girl sings about a guy, the gender is swapped in case of a male cover but not here. He sings about a man. It’s a first.”

Nate nodded blankly.

You could have your choice of men
But I could never love again

He's the only one for me
Jolene

I had to have this talk with you
My happiness depends on you
And whatever you decide to do
Jolene

It was the most gut wrenching interpretation of a song Nate had ever heard. It broke something deep in his soul, moved it. The guy was pouring everything he had in his singing and Nate could feel his pain, his longing as if it were his own. Jolene could be so many things for him.

"Pretty impressive, eh?" Will said, looking at the kid's reaction.

"Yes," Nate nodded softly.

The emotions in the car had shifted. From joyful and light, they were now heavy.

"You know Nate," Will said again, his tone cautious and hesitant, "Your dad can be a little... boorish sometimes and your mom's a bit old fashioned but your parents love you no matter what."

Nate frowned, "I know."

Why was Will asking him that? Nate knew he wasn't going to propose or anything so why say something like that? Seeing the boy's confusion, he explained himself further.

"What I mean is, if you ever feel like you're hiding something from them out of fear then don't. Don't shut yourself from them."

Nate's frown deepened as well as his confusion, "Did my mom pester you about something?"

"Not directly."

"My dad then?"

"He didn't pester me but we talked." Nate was about to answer but

Will continued, "I'm not trying to make you say something, kid. I'm not. I'm just saying that you can trust your folks. For anything. They love you even if they bicker all the time."

Nate was silent for a little while. He knew what this was about. What Will was very awkwardly getting at. His sexual orientation. Jezebel was terrified her son might be gay because he didn't seem interested in girls. They argued a lot about it. They thought Nate couldn't hear but he did. And she was right. He wasn't interested in girls. Was he interested in boys? He didn't know. He never got to ask himself that question. All his life, he had only ever been interested in one person, Will. There had never been anyone else.

"Will, can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"Why did you and my dad break up? I know you two were involved at some point. I saw the pictures when you were younger. He thinks he hid them well but he hasn't. They're in his special box in the office. Is it because my mom got pregnant with me? The pressure and all? I don't think my parents have ever loved each other. They got married out of convenience. They're not happy. Dad is only happy when he sees you. He's gay isn't it? If he is, why didn't he stay with you?"

Nate hadn't meant to talk this much. He really hadn't but the words flew out of his mouth without he could prevent them. Beside him, Will sighed.

"I can't answer those questions, Nate. You should ask your dad. I can't talk for him. This isn't my place. And honestly, I don't think you should venture in your father's romantic past."

"Why not? Is it bad?"

"No, it's not bad. It's just that your dad is a father but also a person and well, sometimes people have their own reasons and their children shouldn't get involved in any of that. Focus on your own life, on trying to find what makes you happy. Let your dad be a dad to you. Nothing else in his life should be of your concern."

Nate wanted to answer that Will was the one element in his life that made him happy. The one constant. But he knew this wouldn't have been an acceptable answer.

"Did my dad leave you?" he insisted.

"Nate!"

"I just want to know. I won't ask any other question. Promise."

Will cocked his head to the side and his gorgeous green eyes met his. He seemed to hesitate a moment before capitulating with a sigh.

"Your father and I didn't have the same path ahead of us. We had to choose which to take. In the end, each of us took our own and we parted ways. That's how life works."

Nate nodded silently. At the same moment, Will's phone buzzed.

"It's Ravi. Can you pick up and tell him we'll join him in ten minutes?"

Nate did as told and grabbed the phone, putting an end to their conversation.

They had lunch with Ravi in a nice Paki restaurant downtown. The place wasn't anything fancy but the food was delicious. Only locals went there. Nate had always wanted to know how it worked for Will and Ravi, given their celebrity status and profession. Ravi wasn't as nearly as popular as Will - and didn't want to for obvious reasons - but people had to know he dated Will and they had to know who Will was! He wanted to ask but refrained, given the location. He didn't want to make Ravi uncomfortable and raise topics that were probably never discussed in places like this. They talked about school instead and his projects. Ravi always asked a lot of questions about every aspect of his life and always seemed genuinely interested in Nate's answers.

Ravi didn't join them at the exhibit. He wasn't very fond of art. Nate really liked Ravi - he was his third favorite person (the first two being

Will and his aunt Nancy) - but he wanted to spend this special time with Will. It was so rare for him to have Will to himself for more than five minutes!

The rooms were crowded with people, the walls covered in all the most famous paintings of the Spanish artist. His style was so polished and detailed. Nate loved his work. His favorite painter by far and greatest source of inspiration. He stopped in front of one that he particularly liked.

"The metamorphosis of Narcissus," he whispered.

Will joined him, observing the painting too.

"I love the colors he used on this one," he said, "He painted it during one of his paranoia crisis. He called that method of painting the *paranoiac-critical method!*"

Nate turned to look at him, listening to his art lessons with rapt attention before returning his focus on the painting, "He must have been such a fascinating man!" he noted.

"Not quite well in the head too!" Will joked.

"He was a genius! Geniuses are always kind of insane!"

"That's true!"

They walked through the rooms, looking at the paintings, making comments and exchanging remarks. Nate felt perfectly content. At home, in a world made of strange silhouettes and shades of colors. A world that talked to him more than all the empty words he exchanged with his classmates on a daily basis. Those deconstructed shapes and disturbing metaphors had meaning to him. They used a language he could read. A language Will taught him when he was still a boy, gifting him his very first crayons, showing him how to pour bits of his soul on a piece of paper.

"He truly had an obsession for watches!" Nate noted, looking at all the painting depicting melting watches.

"An obsession with the passing of time and how the human's brain

functioned around memories,” Will commented.

They navigated from room to room in agreeable companionship until one caught Nate’s attention, forcing him to make a halt. It was the painting of a humanoid figure whose crooked body was entirely made of drawers. Its long hair hiding its face, long arm reached toward an open door as if in pain.

“Ah! I knew you’d like this one!” Will said, noticing the kid’s sudden fascination, “*The anthropomorphic cabinet*. It’s quite your style!”

“I love it! I’d never seen it before!”

“Dali painting more than 200 paintings! I’m not even sure they’re all displayed here!”

“This one is so beautiful!”

Nate remained enthralled in front of the painting for long minutes, unable to look away. There were so many details, so many interpretations possible. Will didn’t say anything. He stayed by the kid’s side in silence, sharing this moment with him.

“Excuse me?”

They turned to see a young man had stopped beside Will, looking shy and a bit flushed.

“I’m sorry to disturb you, sir.”

Will’s face broke into a soft smile, “Hi,” he said, “What can I do for you?”

The young man remained motionless for a while, looking at Will agape, shocked that Will was actually talking to him. He probably expected to be sent packing.

“Hi!” he looked completely stunned, blinking at Will for long seconds, “Wow... You’re even more beautiful in real life!”

Will chuckled, “Thanks.”

Nate bit his lip to hide his smirk. He could understand what the boy was feeling. Even to him, Will was vision to behold anytime he saw him and Will was literally part of his family! So to a complete stranger Will might have looked particularly dazzling.

The fan blinked again, seeming to regain his senses, "I'm sorry to bother you. I'm a huge fan of your work."

Will's gentle smile widened, "Do you want an autograph?" he proposed to help the poor boy who seemed to have lost his tongue.

The boy's eyes immediately widened in awe, "Yes, please!"

Will took a pen out of his pocket. He always carried one, just in case. Job habit.

"Do you have something to write on?"

"Oh! Uh! Yes, here!" He handed Will a napkin from his bag, "Is this ok? It's clean!"

Will nodded, "What's your name?"

"It's Josh."

Will signed the napkin and handed it back to the young man who looked like Will had just offered him the most precious of jewels.

"Thank you very much, sir. I love your educational videos. They helped me a lot accept my sexuality and come out to my parents."

Will hadn't turned away from the young fan. He was listening to him, for real.

"I'm glad!" he said with a genuine smile.

Josh nodded, "Thank you for your time. Have a great day!"

"You too, Josh. Take care!"

The young man blushed and gave Will a last short nod. He turned to Nate, as if seeing him for the first time. He blinked and sent the

teenager a puzzled look, half curious, half envious. Nate smirked a little, feeling suddenly quite important. Yes, he knew Will. He was his sister's godfather and his father's ex lover! He knew Will since he was born! He was lucky like that! The young fan seemed to agree with his silent condescending superiority. He gave the pair a last look and went his way.

"Sorry," Will apologized sheepishly.

Nate shook his head, "It's ok! He was nice!"

They continued their tour around the gallery.

"How come I never had an autograph?!" Nate playfully asked.

Will cocked his head to the side, "Have you ever asked for one?"

"Do I need too?"

"Well, that's usually how it works."

They stopped for a snack at the end of the afternoon at the event cafeteria. Will ordered some coffee and Nate a hot chocolate and a donut. They didn't really talk, mostly enjoyed their quiet break. From time to time, Nate dared one look at the man sitting crossed legged across him, admiring him. He couldn't believe how lucky he was, spending all his day with his secret beloved. He knew it wasn't a date but it did feel a bit like it to him.

As they sipped on their hot beverages, two men accosted them out of nowhere.

"You're Will Byers, aren't you? The porn guy?"

Will frowned, his expression turning cautious, "I am."

The guy smirked. There was something off about him. He looked the opposite of the gentle fan of earlier. His eyes flickered between Will and Nate and his smirk widened. Nate's heartbeat increased. He had a bad feeling about this. Those guys were here for trouble. He tightened his arms around himself as protection. Beside him, Will wasn't looking away, challenging him.

“I didn’t know porn actors enjoyed art.”

“There seems to be a lot of things you don’t know,” Will whispered, his voice as cold as ice.

“I’m not particularly into guys myself but you’re a fine one. I wouldn’t be against a quickie.”

The man licked his lips like a predator. It was gross. Beside him, his friend cackled. Will blinked, unimpressed. He was clearly used to those awkward situations. Nate, however, wasn’t and sweat rapidly gathered in the crook of his palms.

“Well, you’ve got your friend,” Will said with a detached expression, “I’m sure he can help you out.”

“I want to *fuck* you,” the man snarled.

Nate swallowed, making himself smaller on the chair. He was feeling terribly uncomfortable for Will and a bit scared too. Will however was only licking his bottom lip, keeping his expression perfectly neutral. He was used to this.

“Please, sir, there are children here. Watch your language.”

“How much do you take?”

“I’m not a prostitute. I don’t have sex with strangers on demand.”

“Come on! Don’t be like that! I’ll make it worth your while!”

“I’m sorry, sir, I’m gonna have to ask you to leave. You’re intruding in my private life and you’re scaring the kid.”

At the mention of Nate, the man turned his full attention on him. The dirty look he had earlier was back, “The kid, eh? I knew this whole thing about not fucking teens was just for show!”

Will’s impassive expression immediately switched to murderous.

“I beg your pardon?”

“He’s cute. I’ll give you that.”

Nate looked away, feeling a bit violated by those two dirty eyes.

“Leave. Now,” Will seethed between clenched teeth.

Nate had never seen him so angry. He looked about to pounce on the guy.

“Can he take you? You’re pretty big after all.”

Nate blushed immediately hearing those words. Beside him, Will’s demeanor shifted to that of a wolf. He really thought Will was going to punch the guy. But he didn’t. He gave him his most disgusted expression, looking at him as if he were a bug.

“If you want to spread your lewd fantasies on me, go ahead. But leave the boy out of this. I will not tolerate it.”

“You’re defending your lover. It’s cute!” the other man sneered.

Nate’s heart looped in his chest. *Will’s lover*. If only... Will wasn’t partaking in his desires though.

“He’s my kid! Not my lover! Keep your vile accusations to yourself!” he spat.

Nate’s heart sank in the bottom of his stomach, taking the full hit of the public rejection. Around them, a crowd had begun to form. People were putting two and two together and had started to recognize Will. Some had even put their phones out.

“Please don’t record that,” Will asked the couple of persons who were filming.

He sighed, grabbed his wallet, threw a couple of bills on the table and rose on his feet.

“Come on, Nate. Let’s go.”

Nate swallowed, joining Will who led him away into the hall. His heart was hammering in his chest. It was too much all at once. They

left the exhibit in hurried steps, passing through whispering people. Most of them were confused as to why Will was being chased with a teenager. He was using his arms and hands to protect Nate and cover him from their eyes. It was the first time in a long while Nate has been this close to Will's body and it wasn't exactly helping him focus. He could feel Will's strong arms around him, making his heart beat even faster and heat pool into his groin. He just hoped no one would notice. He clearly wasn't ready to pop a boner for the whole world to see!

When they reached the car, Will almost threw Nate on his seat. Some people had followed them and were still taking pictures. Will started the engine and drove off. He remained entirely silent for long minutes, trying to regain his calm. Nate waited patiently. He was a little shaken himself.

"I'm sorry, kiddo," Will eventually said after a while, "I'm really sorry."

"It's ok, Will. I'm fine."

"No it's not. What those guys implied wasn't correct at all. I'm really sorry," he reached behind him to grab a plastic bag, "Here. It's for you."

Nate took the gift and checked the contents of the bag. It was a replicate of the painting he had loved so much. The anthropomorphic cabinet.

"Oh wow! Thanks Will! It's super nice!"

"Since you liked it so much!"

"Thanks! I love it!"

Will winked at him. They were silent again. Will was still tense, his hands gripping the wheel angrily. Nate was feeling bad for him.

"Does it happen often?" Nate asked softly, "Guys who pester you like that."

"Unfortunately, yes. That's the con of being famous. People think you

belong to them. They have no boundaries. And since I'm a sex worker, it's even worse. I'm the lowest of the lowest to them."

"You're not!" Nate exclaimed.

Will turned to look at him with a gentle smile that warmed his heart, "You're sweet."

His heart leaped in his chest happily. Will had called him sweet! A moment later though, his expression hardened again.

"That they go after me, I don't really mind. I'm used to it. It's part of the job. I've accepted it. But they went after you and I can't tolerate that. What those two pigs implied made me sick to my stomach. I'm really sorry."

Nate swallowed, taking another small pang of indirect rejection. He remained silent for a moment, waiting for Will to calm down. The man was tightening his jaw, the bones and muscles playing under his skin.

"What about Ravi? I mean, he's Muslim right? His community mustn't be so thrilled about his career choice. I mean, my mom's religious too and she's Puritan crazy!"

"Most of them don't even know he does porn. Ravi's parents are very open minded and adorable though. They believe in God but they're not dogmatic. They've accepted that their son loves men as part of God's decision for him and they've accepted me but they don't know about the true nature of his job. Only his sister Latisha knows. Beside, Ravi isn't very public so only the very small niche of the gay porn community recognizes him. His parents don't even have access to the Internet or know how to use a computer! His dad is a manual worker and his mom bakes cakes all day!"

"He's not afraid they'll find out?"

"It's a risk he's willing to take. Like all of us."

Nate considered Will for long seconds, thinking everything they had talked about over.

"The reason my dad left you," he began quietly, "it was your job, wasn't it? I heard my parents talk about it a few times. They always think I never hear anything but I do." Will's expression turned sullen. It broke Nate's heart. "I'm sorry Will. I didn't mean to intrude or anything! I'll stop asking about my dad. I promise. I'm just kind of curious. I want to understand."

Will licked his lips, eyes focused on the darkening road ahead.

"It was difficult for your father," he said after a while, "There wasn't social media at the time but celebrity was already bad. You have no idea what it was like for your dad, dating a rising porn star like me. People stopping us in the streets all the time, making lewd comments about our sex life... Listing in front of Mike all the things they wanted to do to me... Not to mention all the homophobia... The insults... The threats... It was hard for him. He needed the life your mother offered. I couldn't give him that. I accepted his choice and backed away."

"Did he ever ask you to quit your job?"

"Yes."

"You refused?"

"I love my job. I think that when you're in a relationship with someone, the person you commit yourself with must accept you for who you are and everything you stand for. If not, then they're not the right person for you. Your father couldn't accept my job and I respect that. But I didn't want to stop doing something I loved and which was so important to me. Again, the past is the past and I'm glad your father found your mom, no matter what you say! Your mom has always supported your dad and she's always been loyal to him. And he can be a real pain in the ass, trust me! Besides, they had you and your sisters! You wouldn't be here if they hadn't met."

"But if I hadn't been born, I wouldn't know that I could exist!" Nate noted.

Will chuckled, "Ok it's a little early for the philosophical debate!"

Nate smirked, "I'm serious."

"So am I. If we're gonna have this type of debate, I'll need a glass of wine first."

"And what do I get?"

"A diet coke. Because you're underage and there's no processed sugar in my fridge."

Quiet returned for a bit. Nate was watching the road pass in front of him. It was almost completely dark outside. Will was focused on his driving.

"Do you think I'd make a good porn actor?" he suddenly asked out of the blue.

"No."

The answer and tone were so categorical, they forced Nate's head to spin on his neck and look at Will with a frown.

"Why not?" He was almost hurt and disappointed, "I thought you loved your job!"

"I love my job but it's not a common job and it shouldn't be considered like one. Porn and sex work in general are very special, Nate. Not everyone can do that. You need a very specific mindset to be able to do what I do. You need to be able to detach yourself from your own body and consider it mechanically. Not everyone can achieve that. That requires a very special way to see yourself and proper training which you don't have."

"You could train me!"

He hadn't meant to flirt. Not really. He didn't even know how. But it was flirting. Plain and simple. Out in the open of a car. Will tossed his head towards Nate immediately. He had the same scolding expression his father had when catching him doing something bad.

"Very inappropriate, Nathaniel," he said in a firm reprimanding voice, "Very inappropriate."

Nate looked down, feeling foolish, “Sorry, Will. I didn’t mean to upset you.”

Will was shaking his head, eyes back on the road. He was shocked and wrinkled his lips in a pout of disgust, “Jesus Christ, you’re like my kid! Don’t joke about stuff like that!”

“Sorry.”

“Seriously, after the episode with those two idiots and what they implied... Not cool, kiddo! Not cool.”

Will sounded really shaken. Nate had never seen him like that.

“Sorry.”

Will continued, “It’s fine. I know you were trying to joke. But it was inappropriate. You wouldn’t say stuff like that to your dad, would you?”

Nate took a deep breath. The answer to that question was very simple. *You’re not my dad.* But Will was so upset, Nate had to back off. If he told Will he didn’t see him like a father figure and got himself off daily watching his videos and imagining himself in the partner’s position, it would end the man and Nate didn’t want that. Will had just openly rejected his advances. The pain was enough as it was. He didn’t need to make it worse.

He shook his head as a response. Will gave him a short nod.

“Please don’t say stuff like that again. It made me very uncomfortable. It’s bad enough that a grown man can’t be seen with a teenager without being the victim of vile accusations. So when that grown man happens to be gay and a porn star, it makes it all the worse.”

“I know. I’m sorry, Will. I shouldn’t have said that like that. It was a bad joke...”

“It’s ok. I’m not mad. But please, don’t do it again. Especially not in front of your mother! She’d crucify me!”

“I wouldn’t and I won’t! I promise. Sorry.”

No amount of apology could compare to the level of awkward the boy was feeling at that moment. Shame was sipping through his bones like poison, coating him in it. He had ruined everything.

“Speaking of your mom,” Will said, changing the subject, “text her to tell her we’re on our way back before she sends a patrol! We’ll be in Hawkins in one hour and a half.”

Nate nodded and did as told.

The rest of the drive was quieter. Will was still upset and Nate didn’t want to push him. They exchanged about the exhibit and their favorite paintings exposed. Will asked Nate about his art project. Nate promised to send him a picture of it when ready. They didn’t talk about Mike or Will’s job again. And Will didn’t make any other allusion at Nate’s words. They made a small halt for a dinner snack that they ate on the road. It would be late when Nate came home and the kid was hungry. They reached Nate’s house around 9pm. Jezebel was already waiting for them on the porch. She looked like a frozen tree planted in its pot. For how long had she been there, Nate didn’t know but he would have wagered all evening. Mike joined her, heading toward the vehicle and Will’s opened window.

Nate emerged from his side, waving at Will, his gift preciously secured in his hand.

“Thanks for everything, Will! I had a great time!”

“My pleasure, kiddo!”

The boy joined his mother inside the house, leaving the two men alone. Mike bent over to be at Will’ level, using the open window as support.

“You want to come in a moment for a coffee?” he proposed.

Will shook his head, “No I’m good, thanks! It’s getting late and I still need to drive back to Chicago.”

Mike nodded, “Ok then. Nate wasn’t too much of a pain?”

“Your son is not a pain, Mickey. He’s a sweet kid. I’m glad he had fun.”

They exchanged a long look, trying to keep this moment alive for as long as possible. Will was the first to break the contact.

“By the way, there was a small incident at the exhibit. Crazy pervs harassed me and made gross allusions. They didn’t touch your son or anything but there’s a small chance a video pop up on YouTube... If it’s the case, I’ll see with my lawyers that they remove it. I just wanted you to know first.”

Mike nodded slowly, “A porn actor hanging out with a teenage boy? Of course people are gonna go crazy.”

“I’m really sorry.”

“It’s ok. I know it wasn’t your fault. Besides, Nate doesn’t look particularly traumatized. I won’t say anything to Jez though. I don’t want her to freak out.”

“No, no.”

Mike nodded, looking longingly at the man in front of him, “Drive safely, Will.”

Will started the engine, “Yeah.”

He was about to reverse the car when Mike turned to him again.

“By the way, can you remind me the dates for Islavadora?”

“You’re really coming?!”

“I need a vacation.”

“What about your wife?”

“She needs a vacation too. Not necessarily with me but I don’t have a choice.”

Will rolled his eyes, “Mike! It’s probably the last week of June or first

week of July. I'll have to set that up with Ravi."

"Awesome. Just, can you please not throw any funky party when we're here?"

Will gave him a long look, "Oh, bummer!" he said without emotion, "I was just about to plan a huge orgy party for your puritan wife and seven year old daughter. What a let down!"

Mike smirked. Will shook his head slowly at him before smirking back.

"Idiot!"

Mike chuckled. He wanted to kiss him so bad.

"Text me when you're home ok? That I know you arrived safely."

Will nodded, "Sure thing."

"Thanks again for Nate!"

Will winked and Mike's insides momentarily shrunk. He watched the car disappear down the alley into the night with a heavy heart.

Back into his room, Nate watched Will leave with equal sentiments. He waited until the car was completely gone from his sight before jumping on his bed, a myriad of emotions swirling around his heart. He laid on his back and stared at his ceiling. What a day! What a beautiful day! Ok, he had screwed up a little with the flirting thing but still! He had spent the full day with Will! Will had even bought him a gift! He smiled to himself and grabbed the bag to look at the replica fondly. Just then, his eyes noticed the small signature at the bottom of the painting.

*"To Nate, my favorite boy.
Lots of love,
Will"*

Nate's heart leaped in his chest as he realized that Will had left him

an autograph. His smile widened, feeling happier than ever.

Notes for the Chapter:

Don't hesitate to let me know what you thought!
Cheers!

3. In the Lion's den

Summary for the Chapter:

"Will paraded around the house, popping cherry tomatoes in his mouth as he went. Thirty five years ago, Mike had befriended a small boy alone on a swing. Thirty five years later, that same little boy had morphed into a modern Gatsby. No one in his acquaintances was as accomplished as Will Byers. He was the embodiment of the American ideal of the self made man. A pornstar with the lifestyle of an English dandy."

Notes for the Chapter:

Hey! Sorry for the long wait! I hope you'll like it!

WARNING: Lost of sex allusions, dialogues, situations... Will IS a porn actor. And I'm trying to make that story as realistic as possible.

It was one of those nights where Mike couldn't fall asleep. It was already past two in the morning and after tossing and turning in his bed impatiently, caught between sleep and awakesness, he tiptoed out of the room, careful not to disturb Jezebel who was snoring softly on her side.

He went down the stairs in darkness and silence to the kitchen to make some herbal tea, only switching the light above the stove to cast a dim yellow hue to the quiet room. He could hear the family hamster run in his wheel from the dining room. It sounded like a faint ongoing roar, coupled with the noise of the water boiling in the kettle. After fixing himself a cup of hot tea, he dragged his feet toward the couch to channel surf without much enthusiasm, wrapping himself into a duvet. It was June but the air was chilly.

After a few minutes of looking at advertisements for protein shakes, his head supported in his hand, he switched to a famous talk show and there he was, as luminescent as ever, impeccable in his beige suit

and neatly combed bronze-colored hair. Mike's sleepiness evaporated in a blink and he straightened up on the couch, a long breath leaving his dry lips. Will was laughing, his legs crossed with sophisticated nonchalance. It wasn't unusual for Will to attend TV shows but it was always odd for Mike to see him like this, evidently famous and so at ease with his fame, shining under the spotlight. They were talking about Will's new movie and Mike's body fell forward as if called by the screen.

"So, Will," the host said, "You're here with us tonight because you have some exciting news. Your new film, *The man of average*, has been nominated for an award at the Berlin Film Festival."

Will nodded, "Yes."

Mike blinked and frowned. He hadn't heard. Will hadn't said anything. Will never said anything.

"It's the first time a porn movie has been selected in a regular film festival at all. How do you feel about that?"

Back to the screen, Will smiled, showing white teeth, "I'm excited of course," he said in a soft voice, "But to be fair, many erotic movies are nominated every year in film festivals. And some of them can be very graphic. They just don't have the word porn labelled on them."

"Do you think people have a bias against pornography?"

"Most certainly. They're equally entranced and repulsed by it. It's part of the social paradox we live in."

"A social paradox you know all too well..." the host noted. Will smiled politely but didn't answer with words, "The movie was praised for its aestheticism and work on the characters." Will nodded again, "Did you want to tell a story this time?"

Will uncrossed his leg, "Every movie that I make tells a story, even if there is no dialogue. It tells a story in its own way. But yes, I did try to do something a bit different than what I usually do."

"The main character, Adam, is played by Federico Garcia Bernal."

“Yes.”

“Who isn’t a porn actor.”

“No.”

“Was it a deliberate choice? To take a film actor to play the part of Adam? Why not choose a porn actor right away?”

Mike’s frown deepened. His lips curled into a grimace of confusion. Why hadn’t Will said anything about this project? Were they so estranged now? Was Mike too ordinary, too boring for Will to confide about his film work? This sounded like a big step.

“I wanted to tell a story that was believable to viewers,” Will explained, “I needed an actor with Federico’s innocence. I wanted an actor who was able to provide a vast array of emotions because that’s what the movie is about, emotions. Had I taken a porn actor, the portrayal of Adam would have been vastly different and that’s not what I wanted.”

“Are you saying that porn actors can’t play emotions?” There was a subtle hint of amusement in the host’s voice and ghost of a smile.

“Porn actors are not film actors. I never pretended otherwise. We don’t have the same training. We don’t work the same way.”

The host took a small pause to look at the cards he had in hand, reading his notes to continue the interview, “The movie tells the story of Adam, a bartender played by Federico Bernal who falls in love with Eric, a rising porn star.”

“Yes.”

Mike’s scowl deepened. That movie plot didn’t sound any good. It was too familiar for its own good.

“Eric, however, is played by Mark Riesling who is a porn actor you already worked with many times.”

Will nodded, “Yes, Mark is an old friend and a co-worker. We shot many films together even before I started directing and was still

acting. So I know him very well.”

On the screen, the image switched to pictures of Will with a blond man. They were holding each other by the shoulder, smiling, sharing quiet companionship. Mike groaned. He was feeling that old, familiar pang of jealousy slowly growing in his gut. You bet he knew that guy well! They had fucked for the whole world to see! This Mark had seen everything that made Will! His hands began to shake. He was feeling irrationally angry again.

The image returned to the set with Will and the host who continued sharing his thoughts, “The movie is actually very intimate and I mean it in the true sense of the word,” he noted, “It’s also quite the rollercoaster of emotions.” Will nodded quietly, “More than a movie, I felt like I was intruding in the lives of two very real people when seeing it for the first time. Is this movie a bit of an autobiography?”

Will frowned a bit and shook his head, “In a way but not entirely. I did pour some elements of myself in the movie and Mark’s character. I mean, every creator shares some of themselves in their creation and I did use my personal experience as a porn actor to write some scenes and the portrayal of Eric and his relations with the rest of the world.”

“In the movie, the relationship between Eric and Adam is very complicated. Adam gives Eric a lot of trouble for doing porn. And it’s not a happy ever after love story. Even in the dialogues, you make it sound like it’s very difficult to have a stable romantic life for porn actors.”

Will had a small, enigmatic smile, “Dating is always difficult when you do porn.”

“Which is odd,” the host said, “One would think it would actually be easier for you guys to score!”

Will shook his head, “On the contrary. It can be easy to have sex with groupies but that’s never something I was interested in. I know many porn actors who enjoy this part of the job like rock stars do. I don’t.”

“Would you say that you are hopelessly romantic?”

Will laughed, “Yes. With a strong emphasis on the hopeless!”

“That bad?!”

“Being a sex worker is complicated. People fantasize about you but they don’t want to be with you. They see you as a product of consumption, not as a person. Past the solo session, they return to being disgusted by what we do. Doing porn is dirty and people don’t want to commit to dirty.”

Mike looked away. He remembered heated conversations, words he wished he could have taken back... Will wasn’t wrong...

“Many porn stars are married though,” the host pointed out.

“True. But it doesn’t make it easier.”

“So you say that porn is very isolating? We do have a very sordid image of the industry. Especially with the way it treats women.”

Will bit his lip, “There are many reasons as to why people accept to do what they do in porn. I’ve been in this industry for twenty years by choice. I started this career by choice. I was never forced into it. I’m not a drug addict who signed a contract in a back alley. I know what I’m doing and why I’m doing it. But that doesn’t mean I’m stupid either. Or blind. I know this can be a very ugly industry. I know what happens on many, many sets. I’m not naive. I’m not naive because I’ve seen it. I’ve seen the abuse, the drugs, the social pressure. The blatant homophobia and misogyny. I did a couple of movies for mainstream companies and what happened between two shots shook me to my core. Many people arrive on porn sets with ideals of fame and fortune. Pretty boys. Pretty girls. They’re young and have no idea what they’re doing here. They want to do porn because they want to do something daring to piss off their parents. Because pretty girls are still obsessed with the idea of being sexy and the boys of being men. The fall is brutal and most of them never recover. The porn industry can be a very bad place and if you’re not ready for it, if you don’t have guts strong enough to fight for yourself, you’re gonna get swallowed up and destroyed.”

There was a small pause and silence lingered on the set for a while

longer. Mike blinked, feeling awake again. Will's fiery outburst had shaken his sleep deprived brain.

"The bad side of this industry is one of the movie's themes, some of the scenes being very uncomfortable. Was it important for you to incorporate them?"

"I wanted to give a realistic portrayal of the porn industry. I didn't want it to be too dark or too glamorized. I wanted to show it as I live it, a multifaceted business."

"In the movie, Eric gets recognized in a restaurant and kicked out. Is this something that already happened to you?"

"Oh yes! Unfortunately. Too many times to count."

"Really? People kick you out of restaurants when they recognize you?"

"Not always, no. But that can happen, yeah. Just as the harassment Eric gets by fans in private situations happened too. It's not fun but it's part of the job."

"That's harsh!"

Will shrugged, "You get used to it after a few years!"

"Is this why you only date other porn actors?"

"It helps, for sure!"

"Eric appears rather quiet in the movie. Almost shy. Especially as a teenager. What kind of teenager were you? Would you say that you were the popular heartbreaker?"

Will exploded in laughter. Mike did too. He couldn't help it. Anyone who had known Will at 15 would have... Will, a popular heartbreaker... The irony!

"No! Not really, no!" Will exclaimed, "I was like Eric. Very shy. Kind of a loner, uncomfortable in my skin. I was even sex phobic for the longest of time!"

“You? Sex phobic?!”

“Oh yeah! I hated physical intimacy. I hated being touched. There were no holding hands or kissing on the cheek! And I was completely freaked out by the idea of sex! I remember when I read about what boys did together in the bedroom, I was so disgusted, I swear to God, I wanted to stop being gay right away! Sex with another boy sounded like a horror movie to me! It took me ages to kiss my boyfriend with the tongue! And even that, man, was that complicated!”

The audience had joined in the laughter. Mike was still smiling fondly. Yes, he did remember Will's complete aversion to romantic interactions. It took them fifty four shots to French kiss without Will going into a panic. But no matter how funny that might have sounded, it wasn't. Not really. Mike knew why Will had had so much trouble with being touched and his body. And his gentle smile was replaced by a veil of sadness.

On set, the host was having a hard time believing Will, “Really?!”

Will nodded, smiling for a bit longer, until his expression softened as he spoke again, “Actually, when I was a child, I went through something very traumatic. Something very close to rape and it left me broken inside for many years. After that, it was very difficult for me to let anyone close physically, even people I loved and trusted.”

Mike felt his insides twist. It was the first time Will talked about what happened. Sure, he didn't say what it was, didn't mention anything supernatural. With the passing of time, they had tried to erase this part of their life. But Will had mentioned it and the ambiance on set shifted. From mirth, it turned to an uncomfortable silence.

“And you ended up doing porn,” the host noted softly.

“It may sound odd but porn actually helped me a lot come to terms with that trauma. It was very therapeutic. It helped me reconcile with myself, my body. My pleasure and my desires. I said it before but porn revealed me to myself.”

“There is one scene in the movie Eric goes through that is something very similar to what you're describing. I suppose it was intentional?”

Will smiled again, "As I said, I poured some elements of myself in Eric's character."

The host blinked and his eyes met Will's, his expression suddenly very serious, "If you're Eric, then who's Adam?"

The question took Mike off guard. Will's smile widened ever so lightly and for the longest of time, he remained silent. Mike waited. His chest heaved. Who was Adam? Who was the bartender falling in love with the porn star? The answer was so obvious, it hurt. And yet, was it that obvious? Or was Mike projecting too much? Hoping too much?

Eventually, Will's lips parted as he gave an answer too vague, "Does he have to be anyone?"

The host blinked, understanding that Will wouldn't grant them any satisfaction. Oddly enough, he didn't push, "Well, thank you Will. Thank you for your time. I wish you the best for this beautiful movie."

Will smiled warmly, extending his arm to shake the host's hand, "Thank you."

They exchanged last courtesies under the public's applause and Will left the stage. Mike sniffled, his duvet half slipping off his shoulder and tea now too cold. His heart was beating in the back of his throat and he felt as if bubbles were swelling and popping in his belly. He had seen Will, heard his voice. And now, he was missing him again which was a silly thought. Will wasn't here with him. He had just seen him through the cold screen of his television set, alone in the middle of the night on his couch. Will's new movie was nominated for an award. A bartender in love with a pornstar. Would Will be foolish enough to write a whole movie as a metaphor for their own failed love? Was Will still thinking about them?

If he was Eric, then who was Adam?

Did he really want to know?

With his heart still beating too fast and random advertisements

playing in the background on the TV, he grabbed his phone from beside him, desperate to calm his nerves. He began to scroll Twitter before opening his photo app instead. They were vacation pictures he had taken the summer before. Will and Ravi had spent a couple of days with them at their lake house. It was nothing like the huge villa Will invited them to this year but they still had a nice time. Will was almost in every picture. One of them caught his sleep-deprived attention particularly. It was a photo of him and Jezebel by the lake, Will laughing at whatever Jez was telling him. Mike smiled to himself. No matter what she said about Will, they were friends and got along pretty fine when alone together. As weird as it sounded, it kind of warmed his heart to know that his wife and the man of his life enjoyed each other's company. It was important somehow. On the right side of the picture, Nate was looking at the pair. It could have been trivial but there was something in the boy's eyes - an intensity - that captured Mike and he frowned at the photograph. Why was the boy looking so sad? Was he looking at his mother? At Will? It was odd and left Mike with a strange feeling nagging the back of his mind.

He shook his head. He was obviously exhausted. His eyes were feeling heavier by the minute. On his phone, 3.45 turned to 3.46 and he yawned, stretching his arms before taking the remote to turn off the TV. He pushed his feet on the ground to lift off the couch and yawned again as he made his way back up the stairs, feeling them creak under his feet. He crossed the dark and silent corridor like a wandering ghost and slipped back into the room he shared with his wife. A heavy smell of sleep burned his nostrils when he passed the door. Shutting his eyes, he listened to the snore coming from the left side of the bed with a mixed feeling of dread and relief. Jezebel hadn't stirred.

On the other side of the corridor, secluded behind the door of Mike's old bedroom, Nate had stilled under the covers, waiting for the trespasser to go away. He knew it was probably his dad and didn't fancy another awkward encounter, especially as this late hour. He focused his hearing on his parents' door. When he was sure he heard it close ever so gently, he resumed what he was previously doing, wrapping his hand around his cock again, his eyes locked on a photo of Will naked, his own hand around his gorgeous erection, his teeth

digging into his lip as if he were inviting the viewer to join in the fun. Nate certainly was.

On June 24, Will's movie *The man of average* won the Berlin Film Festival. For the days that followed he was on every talk show to discuss his career and his film and in every magazine, parading with his two star actors. It annoyed Mike immensely but he was too desperate not to keep his eyes glued to his screen whenever Will was concerned. He had seen extracts of the film. It looked good but Mike wasn't too sure about watching it for real. He had barely exchanged with Will, congratulating him by text only. Will was too busy with interviews to call Mike anyway. They were from different worlds.

In such a context, July arrived faster than they could have anticipated and soon, it was time to pack their bags for the big departure. Mike would have lied if he said he wasn't excited. He was. Islavadora was beautiful. Plus, *Will*. They were leaving the next week for Miami. Once there, the plan was to take Will's private jet to the Island because yes, Will was rich enough to have a private jet. Will was rich enough to own a damn island...

His wife was all over the place, cleaning the house as if they were leaving for the next decade. She was terrified of roaches and was absolutely convinced that if she didn't bleach every corner, they would return to a bug-infected house and Mike knew better than to argue with her. He didn't have the strength anyway. Nate was out to his friend Jessie this afternoon and Shelley and Julie were dozing in front of the TV. Shelley could have participated but she was in a bad mood and Mike didn't have the patience to deal with an edgy teenager. He already had his son for that. So it was his job to check every room in the house for dirty plates and mugs while his wife hoovered the floors and cleaned the gutter.

He found empty bags of chips in his older daughter's room - where did she even find those? - and a plate hidden in the second drawer of her desk. The plate was so dirty, life had almost started developing on the sides... He gagged and took it between two fingers with a

grimace of absolute disgust before rushing to the stairs with the culprit.

“SHELLEY!” he yelled, “SHELLEY!”

The outburst was shortly followed by a long sigh, coming from below, “What?” his daughter said with all the gentleness of a rebellious thirteen year-old.

“What did I tell you about leaving dirty plates in your room?” Mike reprimanded.

“I’m sorry, I forgot!” she answered, not sounding sorry at all.

“I don’t want to see dirty plates in your room again, do you hear me?”

“Yeah, dad... Whatever you say!” he heard her mumble.

“I’m sorry, what was that?”

“Nothing! I’m sorry. I love you dad. You’re the best dad in the world,” she rambled to shut him up.

He sighed and let it go. This was useless. She was just too stubborn. He turned the handle of Nate’s door with his empty hand, inspecting the last of the three rooms. The boy’s room was just as spotless as usual, the opposite of the vortex of entropy that was his sister’s. On his desk, he only found an empty glass of what probably was orange juice. He sniffled and took a step forward to grab the glass that he put on top of the plate he was already holding, knocking the computer mouse that happened to be on his way with the back of his other hand.

The computer screen immediately unlocked. Mike sighed again. How many times had he asked his kids not to let it on? Had he any parental authority in this house at all? It was clear they were not paying the electricity bill at the end of the month! Shaking his head and pushing the plate and glass on the desk, he took the mouse to shut the computer, hovering the cursor over the reduced programs in the shortcut menu. In addition to letting his computer on, Nate had also forgotten to close the programs! This boy! A video game was still

running, as well as a Game of Thrones episode - he really wasn't too happy about his son watching this show but Nate wasn't a baby anymore - and a folder from his documents. The cursor passed over the folder tab in the menu and a preview window popped up, showing thumbnails of what appeared to be photographs. He frowned. On the thumbnails, the photos looked... familiar. His frown deepened.

He suddenly had a very bad feeling about this.

With a shaking hand, he clicked on the preview window to widescreen it. His heart missed a beat and his vision blurred for a second. He knew what he was seeing but for some reason, the logic part of his brain didn't want to cooperate.

There were two things he noticed at once. The photos were all nudes. The photos were all nudes of Will. Now, the first part wasn't so much of a bother. Mike wasn't stupid. Nate was old enough to start having an interest in porn pictures. It was normal, healthy. The second part however left him deeply puzzled and a bit ill. That they featured a naked male, Mike didn't really care. He'd had his doubts over his son's sexual preferences for a while now. But that they featured his naked ex boyfriend - a porn actor he had personally dated, a man he almost raised Nate with... Now, that was the conundrum he hadn't quite expected.

Why on Earth would Nate have nude pictures of Will in his computer? Why would Nate have *porn* pictures of Will in his computer? One of them caught his attention in particular. Will was covered in a sheet so white, it looked almost transparent. Behind the sheet, you could see the outline of his body, his erected cock included. That last detail felt like a slap. The picture was terribly arousing but on his son's computer, it just felt dirty. He shook his head with a grimace, swallowing a mouthful of bile at the horrible thoughts racing through his mind. At the same time, he heard his wife call his name. Still confused and shaken, he reduced the window again and let go of the mouse, taking the dirty plate and glass away with him.

He remained silent all evening and during dinner, looking at his son as if he were seeing him for the first time. The boy was oblivious,

eating his mac and cheese with the innocence of the youth, excited to be going on a trip near Cuba the next week. Mike had trouble touching his food, letting his hand go heavy on the wine instead. He felt haunted, almost insane. Why would Nate have porn pictures of Will in his computer? The question rang incessantly in his head. A little voice was telling him the obvious but he couldn't listen. He just couldn't. Past conversations with Jezebel resurfaced, conversations he had pushed to the side a little too expressly. But what if she was right? What if Nate...? What if the time he intruded, Nate was busy looking at a video of Will? The thought made him gag and he pushed his plate in front of him loudly.

The conversations stopped and his family turned to look at him with a confused expression, "Are you ok, Mike?" Jezebel asked.

"I'm fine," he answered, going stiff, "Just need some air."

He didn't wait for them to continue and rushed off his chair into the back of the yard, hiding in the shed. This was where he went when he wanted to smoke without Jezebel pestering him. Ironically, this was also the place she too went to hide to smoke away from prying eyes. Only, she didn't know he knew.

He remained locked in that shed for a long hour, unable to form coherent thoughts, his fingers curled around cigarette after cigarette. He hadn't smoked that much in a while. *Why would Nate have porn pictures of Will in his computer?* Was it for art? A stupid bet maybe? A school report? No. Not a school report! But then, why? The little voice returned but again, Mike turned it off almost instantly. His son couldn't have this sort of thoughts for Will. It just wasn't possible. It couldn't be. Will had literally raised Nate. He was a second dad to the boy. Nate couldn't have seen him in any other way.

The little voice nudged at Mike again, whispering more insistently.

Technically, Will *wasn't* Nate's dad at all. Will was much older than Nate but they weren't related in any way. And the man was beautiful. It was almost obvious for a teenager to have a crush on the guy. Mike knew Will was very popular among adolescents after all and he didn't have a problem with that. It was perfectly natural for a sixteen year-old to fancy guys like Will. The other kids. Not his. Not his son. It

was too weird. He pinched the bridge of his nose between the fingers of the hand that wasn't holding the cigarette. He didn't like this, didn't like this one bit.

Sleep eluded him again that night and the nights that followed. He didn't say anything to Nate, almost ignoring the boy. He just couldn't face him. His discovery was making him sick. Times and times again, he was tempted to spill the beans to his wife, asking for her opinion, but it would have made things only worse. She would have accused Will, cancelled their trip to Islavadora and as far as Mike was concerned, he didn't think Will had anything to do with any of this. Hell, Mike was even probably reading too much into those pics. Maybe it was just a bad joke and Nate didn't have any disturbing thoughts about the man.

The evening that preceded the departure, Mike couldn't take it anymore and went to knock on his son's door. He had made sure Jezebel had gone to her yoga class with the girls to have the house free of eavesdropping. He knocked twice and turned the handle, peeking inside the room feeling more anxious than he would have liked. The teen was reading a comic book in his bed and lifted up his eyes to his dad with a frown.

"Hey kiddo," Mike began with a forced smile that may have looked pretty awkward on the outside.

"Hey dad," the boy answered, confused by his father's behavior.

"You were not masturbating, were you?" Mike hurried to ask.

Nate's nose immediately wrinkled and his lips puckered in a grimace, "Ew, no. Gosh..."

"Good. Good," Mike quickly dismissed, "Can we talk?"

Nate blinked, "I don't want to talk about masturbation with you."

"I'm not here to talk about masturbation!" he huffed, walking into the room and closing the door behind him.

“Good. I already had mom freaking me out with her Bible, asking if I wanted to talk about it like I was gonna burst into flames if I did! It was awful!”

“Well, I’m pretty sure your mom was trying to do the right thing.”

“She really wasn’t. Really not.”

“Yeah... Listen, we need to talk about something, other than masturbation...”

“Ok...” Nate articulated slowly, looking with dread as his father took his desk chair to sit, “What do you want to talk about?”

Mike remained silent for long seconds, looking around him, as if inspecting the place and Nate was feeling more uncomfortable by the minute. Eventually, Mike cleared his throat and Nate knew this was up to no good. The last time his father had cleared his throat before speaking was when he came to announce their pet rabbit had drowned in the washing machine when he was twelve. At this point, anything was possible and Nate braced himself for the worst.

“It’s not easy to say,” Mike began, unaware of his son’s inner turmoil, “I was cleaning around the other day and I found something that left me... Well, pretty distraught to be honest.”

Nate swallowed, trying to calm his raging nerves. He knew what was coming. It was inevitable and he had been a fool to believe his father wouldn’t notice. Before he could stop himself, the words flew out of his mouth as he spurted an apology, “Sorry about the bottle, dad!” he exclaimed, “I didn’t want to finish it. It was Jessie’s idea. And then the bottle was empty and we didn’t know what to do with it so I hid it there. But it was just a one time thing. I’m not an alcoholic, I swear!” Nate stopped, feeling his heart race in his throat and his head. There, he said it. He confessed.

Mike blinked and his eyes widened as he stared into his distressed son in confusion, “What? What bottle? What are you talking about?”

It was Nate’s turn to be lost, “The bottle of wine behind my dresser...”

“Oh! You hid a bottle of wine behind your dresser? When was that?”

“Two weeks ago...”

“Oh! Hence my missing Merlot and your massive hangover!” Mike replied. Nate bit his lip, feeling stupid and his father shook his head at him, “You think I didn’t notice? Silly boy! I was fifteen before you even existed! I know what a hangover looks like! Jessie, eh? Anyway, no. I’m not here to talk about that. I didn’t even know about it... Although I would appreciate if you had the decency to at least ask before getting wasted on my most expensive bottles!”

Nate retreated into a ball, “Sorry.”

Mike kept shaking his head slowly, “Stealing my bottles with his friends... I knew this day would come! Anyway, I really didn’t come here to talk about this at all...” Nate felt the lump in his stomach lessen dramatically and he allowed his lungs to let go of the air he had been holding, that is, until his father spoke again, “I wanted to talk about the pictures I found on your computer.”

His brain shut down temporarily and he found himself locked into his own mind, searching for a way out. It didn’t help, “What?” he stuttered painfully, shooting upward in his bed, “What pictures?”

Mike’s eyes met his and Nate knew the game was over. He had never seen such a serious expression on his father’s face. He looked like he was about to announce a death sentence and in a way, he was. After those words, Nate’s life would never be the same.

“The nude pictures of Will.”

Nate’s world shattered. He felt his insides drop to the pit of his stomach, as if falling from a rollercoaster. Bile rose into his throat. He was going faint, “This... This isn’t what you think,” he began to ramble pitifully, tears burning his eyes, “I can explain.”

Mike silenced him with a gesture of his hand, “Please, don’t. I’m not here to punish you or yell at you. I just want to talk.”

Nate’s heart was beating so fast in his chest, he was sure his father could hear it.

"First of all, I want you to know that I never meant to snoop. It was an accident. I unlocked your computer screen when cleaning your desk and the image folder was still open. I really didn't mean to intrude in your privacy, I promise."

Mike's voice was oddly calm. But Nate was too panic-stricken to listen.

"How many times did I tell you to shut your computer down when you leave the room?" Mike continued.

"I'm sorry..." Nate whispered, the tears falling on his cheeks.

Mike sighed. He didn't want to make his son cry, "Nate... Please. No. Don't cry. Please don't. I'm not mad. I told you. I'm just surprised. That's all. I never suspected any of that. Why do you have so many photos of Will naked? Please, talk to me."

Nate blinked through the tears. He could have lied. He could have denied everything but what was the point? His father wasn't stupid. And Nate's reactions had already betrayed him anyway. It was over.

"I like him..." he whispered in that same small, broken voice.

Mike closed his eyes, his head falling in his hands. Until the very last moment he had hoped this was just some sort of distasteful joke. Given the boy's reaction, it clearly was not. The joke was on him.

"Ok..." he said, trying his best to keep his cool. The boy looked very upset. He didn't want to antagonize him any further, "When you say you like him, you mean, you're... attracted to him? As in... physically?" Nate nodded blankly and Mike took a sharp intake of air, "I see..."

He remained silent for a few seconds, searching his words. This really wasn't a situation he had been prepared for. In retrospect, it was probably very naive of him not to. Nate wasn't looking at him, too busy being lost inside the maze of his own head.

"Look," Mike said again, "It's not the fact that those photos were pornographic that puzzled me. Nor the fact that they were male oriented. It's ok to have porn pictures at your age. And there's

nothing wrong about being attracted to other boys. I do have a problem however with the protagonist of those pictures... I just don't understand, Nate. Will has always been like a surrogate father to you... He has always taken care of you like his own kid," A terrible thought crossed his mind and he hated himself for it, "Or hasn't he?"

Nate looked up and frowned, "What?" he croaked.

"Has Will ever done anything to... encourage those feelings?" Mike mumbled, feeling dirty as the words left his mouth. Poor Will. If he knew the things Mike was being forced to say, he would be sick.

"What? No! My God, no!" Nate vehemently countered, "He doesn't even know I like him."

Mike let go of the breath he had been holding, "Ok. So, is it the fact that he does porn?" he tried again, "I mean, it's a pretty... daring job. I can understand it fascinates you."

"No, no, no! It has nothing to do with his job!" Nate retorted with a grimace of disgust.

"Because he's older? I was attracted to older men too when I was your age. I could understand."

Nate didn't seem to notice his father had tried to share personal information and shook his head, "No! I don't care about his age!"

"Then why, Nate?" Mike insisted, sounding tired.

"Because he's perfect!" Nate answered, annoyed, "He's gorgeous, smart, funny. He's a talented artist and a wonderful human being. It's impossible not to be in love with him! I don't care he does porn! I never have! I didn't even know he did porn until recently!"

Mike swallowed in distress hearing the confession, "So you mean that you've had those... feelings for some time now?"

"I've always loved him," Nate admitted, "Always. All of you saying that he's like my second dad... Not to me. Never to me." Mike flinched and Nate huffed, "See, you're disgusted!"

"I'm not," he lied, his hand covering his mouth.

"Yes, you are."

Mike shook his head, "Nate, you can understand how disturbing this is for me," Nate shrugged, "I mean, put yourself in my position. You're my son. My baby boy. And Will is my ex boyfriend. The first person to hold you as a baby after your mom and I. It's... terribly unsettling. I just don't understand how I could have missed that."

Nate shrugged again, "You're blind to everything when Will is concerned anyway..."

Mike swallowed. The boy wasn't wrong. He had so many questions... Questions he wasn't sure he had the courage to ask. Even less the courage to hear the answer of.

"Have you watched any of his videos?" he tried after a while. He waited and eventually, Nate nodded. The lump in his throat was so thick, it made it almost difficult to breathe, "How many of them?" He wasn't sure he wanted to know.

Nate shrugged, "A few... Those you can find on pornhub..."

Mike inhaled deeply again, "Listen, Nate. I'll always support you if you're gay-"

"-I'm not gay!" Nate countered with emotion, "I just like Will. Just him. No one else. I'm not gay."

Mike nodded feebly, "Ok. Whatever. I'll always support you - even if you're not gay. But please, do try to focus your affection on someone else. The idea of you having... thoughts on him makes me terribly uneasy. I won't lie about that."

Nate chuckled darkly, not looking up from the focus point on his lap, "Why? Afraid I'm gonna steal your man?" he bitterly slurred.

Mike's heart missed a beat, "What?"

Nate shrugged, "I don't know. It's like you're jealous or something..."

"I'm not jealous!" Mike exclaimed although it did sound fake to his own ears which was preposterous. He couldn't be jealous of his own kid!

"You could be. I look like you after all. I'm basically a younger, hotter, version of you. I'm literally the age you had when you and Will started fucking..."

Mike's expression hardened immediately, "First of all, that is not true. We started having sex when we were seventeen, not fifteen, so older than you," Nate rolled his eyes, "Second of all, I'm trying very hard to remain civil, here, Nate. And it's becoming really difficult, trust me. Don't push me, kid."

Nate shrugged. For someone with such a smart mouth, he looked particularly dejected, "Whatever. It's not like I had any chance anyway... If I don't see him as my dad, he clearly sees me like his kid!" he spat.

The heartbreak in Nate's voice hurt Mike and he went to sit on his son's bed, beside him, "Nate..." he said, his voice soft again, "Will loves you." It sounded lame, even to his ears, "Not the way you want, ok. But he does..."

"I don't want to be his kid!" Nate whined, "I want him to be my lover!" Mike froze, every fiber in his being in complete shock. He truly hadn't anticipated those words. And boy, how dirty they sounded! Nate didn't seem to have noticed and continued, "I bet he's a killer in bed!"

Mike tried to breath through his nose. He honestly had no idea how those handle such intimate confessions. On a positive note, his son felt apparently comfortable enough to open up on a very personal level but at what cost...

"You're freaking out..." Nate mumbled in a sad voice.

"What? No, no. I'm not."

"Liar."

"Well, it's just odd hearing you say those words. You're my baby

boy.”

“I’m not a baby!”

“You are to me.”

Nate shrugged, “Will told me you left him because of his job. Is it true?”

Mike turned to look at him with wide, alarmed eyes, “You asked Will about my relationship with him?”

Nate shrugged, “I was curious.”

“I don’t want you to ask Will about things like that.”

“Why not?”

“Because it doesn’t concern you.”

The boy dismissed him, “So, is it true?” he asked again.

Mike shook his head and let go of a deep sigh, “I’m really not comfortable having this conversation with you, Nate...” Seeing that the kid was still awaiting an answer, he braced himself and continued, “I can imagine that someone like Will is like a sex God to you. You’re young, inexperienced.. It’s understandable.”

“I’m not inexperienced!” Nate vividly complained.

Mike paused and sent his son a pointed look, “Really? Have you ever had an actual sexual relationship with something other than your hand?”

Nate glared at him, “No.”

“Then you’re inexperienced and my point still stands.” Nate shrugged but Mike ignored him, “My mistake was to believe that my relationship with Will would make it impossible for you guys to see him as something else than a father figure. I admit, I didn’t anticipate that. It’s on me. From a logical perspective, I can see why it happened now. Will is a gorgeous man. He’s obscenely rich and famous. I can

imagine that for a teenager raised in a traditional environment, Will appears like some sort of subversive hero. He's like an embodiment of freedom and self-assessment. There is something fascinating about that on paper."

"I don't care about his job!" Nate repeated.

"But it's part of the fascination. No matter what you say."

"No, it's not. Besides, I know you hate his job. You dumped him because of it... He told me. So obviously, you have a bias against that!"

There were some accusatory notes in Nate's voice that didn't sit well with Mike and the man stared at his son for a long second, trying to read him through. And he didn't like the fact that Will had talked about them to his son. He would have to say a few words about that when he was him.

"Dating a porn star is complicated, Nate," Mike said, "Trust me. You probably think it's hot and sexy. It's really not. It's cold, embarrassing and very lonely. To be harassed by pervs all the time. The disgusting letters, the insults, the threats... Not being able to enjoy a single movie date because some weirdo had decided to stalk Will while we were trying to have dinner. The allusions they made about us. About me... Intimacy is supposed to be special for a couple. You'll see when you get there. Something that is shared just by the two of you. Like a secret. The hesitancy, the lack of skills... Sometimes it's just very nervous and not very good but that's what makes it so wonderful. So magical. Learning together. Being awkward together. With Will, there was none of that left. Sure, to answer your question, he's a killer in bed. He's a professional. So yes, he's good. If for you, good means skilled. Then yes, Will is highly skilled. His technique is perfect. But in the end, that's all there is, a technique. Having sex with Will is like having sex with a robot. It's mechanical, calculated. Not to mention the problem of STDs. In the 1990's, when Will started doing porn, the AIDS epidemic was ravaging the gay community. We could have caught that awful virus dozens of times. We never did but that still terrifies me to this day. And you have no idea what it's like to date someone who sleeps with other people all day long, who uses chemical products to keep unnatural erections, who talks about his

own body like a piece of meat... It was far from sexy.”

“So you rejected him?”

“I asked him to make a choice. To choose between us and his job. He chose his job. And I’m fine with that. He’s better off with Ravi. They have the same job. The same way of seeing things. It’s easier for everyone. Besides, I have you guys. You wouldn’t exist if I had stayed with Will.”

“Do you even love mom?” The boy’s question was almost too soft to hear and it broke Mike’s heart.

Mike frowned, taken off guard, “Yes, I do. Of course I do!”

“But you prefer men.” It wasn’t a question.

Mike sighed, “Nate, I really don’t want to talk about that. You shouldn’t concern yourself with your father’s sexual orientation. Focus on your life.”

“Have you ever cheated on mom with a man?”

“No! Of course not! What kind of question is that?!”

Nate shrugged apologetically. A moment passed during which none of them said a word. Nate was looking at his feet and Mike staring at him quietly, observing him.

“Dad?”

“Mmh?”

“Are you mad?”

“No.

“Freaking out?”

“No.” He was freaking out! He was freaking out alright!

“Please don’t tell mom anything. She’d lose her mind and accuse Will and Will hasn’t done anything at all.”

"I know. I won't tell her. But she's being suspicious, you know."

"I know. She's mom."

Mike nodded. He pushed on his feet to lift up off the bed.

"Dad?" Nate called again.

Mike turned to look at his son, "Yes?"

"I'm sorry I said I was gonna steal your man. I won't. It's not like I have a shot anyway..." He was back to looking depressed and Mike felt his heart tighten. He hated seeing his child in distress.

"Nate," he said, "I know it looks impossible now but this infatuation will pass. I promise. You just need to meet someone else. Preferably someone your age."

Nate shrugged, "I don't care about them."

Mike pulled his lips into a thin line, "Maybe not now. But maybe that'll change."

The boy heaved his shoulders again, "Maybe..."

Mike sighed and patted his son's head, "It's gonna be alright. I promise."

Nate looked up to meet his eyes, "Please, don't tell Will I like him. He'll freak out."

"I won't."

Nate nodded slowly, "Thanks..."

Mike smiled and ruffled the boy's hair tenderly, "If you could limit your consumption of Will's videos, I would appreciate it. Do it for your old man."

"I'll try."

"Thanks."

He spent the rest of the evening in the study, enjoying a moment alone after such a rambunctious exchange. They were leaving for Florida the next day and Mike was feeling anxious and edgy. It wasn't just about Nate's confession. It was him too. He should have been excited spending a full two weeks with Will on their beautiful island but he was terrified. His reflection in the mirror certainly sent a poor image. The pounds he had tried to shed hadn't come off and the idea of disrobing in front of Will made him awfully insecure, so ashamed he was of the sad show he would offer the man he loved most. His swim trunks were almost too short and his belly popped above the waistline. He looked nothing like the lanky twenty-year old Will had loved so many times deep into the night and that fact was enough to make him weep.

With his headphones secured around his ears, blasting old rock songs, he took the small box that hid most of his treasures and opened it to reveal the pictures it contained. There were old pictures from a time long gone. Although he knew what he'd see looking at them, his heart still beat with that little pang of anticipated pain. He turned it around and stared at the young man in his leather jacket, rebel and free. He remembered that time as if he were still living it in his head. *1990, San Francisco, The old Parrot.* The secret hotspot of the wildest gay nights on the bay. Will was looking at him with that little smirk. He hadn't started doing porn yet. It was still just the two of them. Will already had a couple of tattoos on his arm. He was beautiful even then and Mike remembered. He remembered how happy they were, how free. He remembered how he thought this would last forever. He blinked at the picture staring deeply at Will's hand on his arm and the smile on his youthful face and his heart missed a beat, suddenly taken by fear, Nate's words making their way back into his head.

Afraid I'm gonna steal your man?

His forehead broke into a scowl as his heart began to beat faster. What a ridiculous thought! The pain and fear spread to his guts as his mind came up with an image of Nate, still blessed with the beauty of youth.

I'm basically a younger, hotter, version of you.

He shook his head, putting the photograph back into the box that he closed in haste. Ridiculous! And yet, the pangs didn't go away for long minutes.

His phone buzzed with a new notification from Twitter, shaking him from his thoughts. Will had posted a new video on his feed. He frowned and clicked on the popin that redirected to the video instantly. The title made him gag a bit, announcing the color.

Truth or False - Debunking the myth of the porno industry with Will Byers.

He sniffled, curious and anxious at the same time. He waited a moment, hesitating, before pressing the play button. He was too Will Byers addicted to resist anyway.

"Hello everyone! It's Will Byers. Welcome back to my channel!"

Mike chuckled. Will was always so very enthusiastic on his videos. He was dressed casually, a white shirt and a pair of jeans. But even that simple outfit looked sinful on him. He swallowed.

"Today I wanted to do a short FAQ to answer the questions you guys ask me the most. So let's go!"

The image switched to a black screen and a text appeared in white.

Question 1: Porn actors don't have any pleasure, it's all fake.

Mike took a deep breath. It started great... Just the thing he had been talking to his son about moments ago. Were they being watched or something?

The image switched on Will who gave his answer, sounding very comfortable with the subject.

"I'm asked that very, very often. Do we have pleasure? Or is it fake? First, it's important to remember that porn actors are actors. Our job is primarily to follow a script, not take our rocks off. So it really depends. Sometimes, I'll fake it, if I'm tired and the shooting's been

going on for five hours. But that doesn't mean that I never have fun on set. I do actually. I really do. Especially on videos that I shoot with friends. Of course, it's not the case for all porn actors but I truly think that it's important to enjoy ourselves. It makes the whole thing much more authentic and healthy. But that's my opinion! So no, we don't *always* fake it. But the question is: can you tell when we do?!" he winked.

Mike huffed. He certainly could.

The image faded to the second question.

Question 2: Porn actors have a higher risk at getting STD's.

Ah. The STD's. The number one Nemesis of Mike and Will's love...

"Twenty years ago, that would have been true," Will conceded as he answered, "There wasn't any legislation then. And I know many actors who fell to the AIDS crisis. That's unfortunate and sad. Today however, things have changed a lot. And in most serious companies, porn actors are tested every two weeks. It used to be every month, now it's every fifteen days. We go through a complete checkup with blood works. We're tested for AIDS but also chlamydia and Gonorrhea. And if they find something, we're immediately put in quarantine with a treatment. We stop working and the people we worked with are immediately tested too and also put in quarantine if need be. We can only return to work when the infection is completely gone and treated. If it wasn't the case before, we now take the subject of STD's very seriously in the pornographic industry. So to answer the question, *no*, porn actors don't have a higher risk at getting STD's. We actually test way more than most people! Because most people will only get tested for AIDS and will forget all about the rest," he pointed at the camera with an accusatory finger, "So do it! Even if you're married! *Especially* if you're married!"

Mike swallowed again and shook his head.

The image faded to another question.

Question 3: Porn actors are brutes and bullies.

“Ah, the lovely reputation of men in the porno industry,” Will joked. “Well, I can’t say it’s a complete lie. We certainly give a bad image. There are two reasons for that. First, as I said, we follow a script and most scripts are written by people who want to make money. And rough sex sells. It’s sad but it’s true. So yes, we follow scripts that can sometimes get a bit heavy. We can hit our partner, insult them, give an impression of being mean and violent. It’s true. I plead guilty for that too. There are movies that I made, especially in the beginning of my career, where I played the part of the dominant top with a bit too much enthusiasm!”

Mike raised his brow. He certainly remembered *that* and the fights that ensued.

Will continued, “There’s a big obsession with power in the porn industry, especially male power. I’m not saying it’s a good thing but that’s what people want to see. They want to see big macho men because it reassures them. It validates their own masculinity. And that’s the second reason. We live in a macho world and porn is but a reflection of that world. Again, I’m not saying it’s good. Or healthy. In retrospect, I realize that having so many rape scenes in porn movies doesn’t help make things better. Many people will tell you that it’s just a fantasy, like a harmless game. I don’t believe that. Not anymore. I used to. And when I shot scenes where I spat on my partner or called them a whore, to me it was just a game. I followed my script. And by doing that, I was part of the problem. We have a responsibility. Giving an image of violence, whether in the way we treat women or male bottoms is not ok. It feeds the sexism and homophobia of our society, it encourages it. I’m trying to change things, have more tenderness and gentleness in the movies I make. More hugs and kisses. I try to erase notions of hierarchy too. I’m known as a top. I built my career on that reputation. But lately, I’ve tried to distance myself from it and shoot scenes where I bottom a lot more.”

Mike choked. That was new! When did that happen?!

“And the good thing is that it’s been received really well. People are actually pretty excited seeing roles reversed. And it’s been really fun doing it too! I think it will take some time before men in the industry let go of their beast-like behavior but I’m confident we’ll get there

eventually. The world is changing after all. And if we do it right, the porn industry will follow.”

Mike’s ears had turned crimson, his heart beating way too fast. *Will was bottoming*. That never happened in Mike’s time. No matter how often he begged, ensuring Will that he’d be gentle and careful. Will never let him. He never trusted him enough to. And that, that hurt Mike even now. His lips puckered in a grimace. Years of rigid sexual roles and now, Will was letting others do what Mike was never allowed to. He swallowed a thick lump of resentment. That would sting for a while.

The fourth question popped. *Porn actors can keep erections for a long time*. But he stopped the video. He knew what Will would say about that. He had lived it. He still remembered the time he had to rush his boyfriend to the hospital because he had taken too much of that stimulant and had been forced to keep an erection for more than eighteen hours. In the end, they had to pump the blood out of his dick and he returned home with a bandage! How glorious! No, he really didn’t want to hear about that. He’d seen enough. The sex education videos he made were interesting and helpful but the porn part was a lot more awkward as far as Mike was concerned.

He sniffled and threw the phone beside him, lost in thoughts.

He wondered what kind of videos his son had seen... He didn’t like this. Didn’t like this at all... Mike hadn’t watched any of Will’s videos in a very long time. He hated them. They were obscene and made him physically ill. He wasn’t against porn per se but seeing the man he loved using sex with that much nonchalance was just too painful.

His phone suddenly flashed again. He frowned. Will had sent him a text. His heart quickened as he read it.

“I can’t wait to see you tomorrow.”

He filled his lungs with air and his chest heaved. He took a deep sigh and blinked, licking his lip as he quickly tapped a half hearted answer.

“Me too.”

A few hundred miles away, Will read the message and smiled, feeling warmer again.

They arrived in Miami in the afternoon after almost missing their flight due to Shelley's latest eccentricity. She was having a statistics phase based on accidents and other hazards and couldn't be talked out of carrying a parachute in her bag in case the plane exploded. Jezebel had tried to take it away to no avail. When they registered for boarding, the parachute in Shelley's backpack happened to pose a major issue and after a good hour fighting with her daughter and a tour in the flight attendant's office, they managed to calm the teenager and convince her to let it to the care of the staff.

Ravi was waiting for them at the airport without Will - for many reasons - and Mike did his best to hide his disappointment. They boarded on a smaller plane that would take them to the island, thirty minutes away from the shore. Ravi wasn't driving. They had a personal pilot doing the job.

Islavadora wasn't an important island but it was beautiful. Luxurious and colorful, framed by crystal clear waters. In the center of the island, there was an impressive Spanish villa at least three times bigger than the Wheeler house with creamy walls, red roof and a hacienda surrounding a bar and a pool. Its location was difficult enough to reach to deter even the most determined of fans and allow them the privacy they needed. It was also the place where Will had shot many of his movies, the scenery being absolutely perfect for wild shootings. It wasn't Mike's first visit. Will had bought the island a few years prior and invited them quite often ever since. Still, the place looked magical every time. A piece of Paradise he and Jezebel could have never afforded. The best they could do in terms of vacation was the cabin by the lake he and his sisters shared during the year. Not that Nancy came often.

The three children were excited and jumped off the plane the moment they landed, looking around them with wide eyes. It was endearing, seeing them so happy. Will came to greet them and Mike felt his insides shrink to nothing when he saw him. Contrary to Mike who was clad in way too many clothes to hide the misery of his

own physical condition, Will was only wearing flip flops, shorts and a deep blue shirt that he had left completely unbuttoned, leaving his sun kissed chest and well defined stomach fully visible, his face half covered by a pair of huge black sunglasses. From the corner of his eyes, he saw Nate stare at Will with an awestruck expression. Of course! It wasn't difficult to understand why. The man looked like a Hollywood Superstar walking straight from a model magazine!

Will smiled at them warmly and pulled Mike in his arms, embracing him tightly, "I'm so glad you came," he whispered in his ear.

Mike swallowed, stunned. He could feel the taut muscles of his back against his hands. His skin had been warmed up by the summer sun and he smelled fresh, a mix of strong male cologne and ocean. It was making him dizzy, almost hard. He had forgotten the effect Will had on him, "I'm glad too," he answered in a raspy voice, trying not to show anything.

They stayed pressed up against each other for long seconds until Mike pulled away, sensing the burning glare of his wife somewhere on his cheek. Will was still smiling and for a moment, it was just the two of them again. It didn't last long and Will turned to hug Jezebel and the kids. Mike observed the exchange he had with Nate with renewed attention. Nate looked red in the face, his eyes shining with excitement as Will clapped his shoulder. On the outside, it looked innocent enough but Mike knew it wasn't. The boy's heart was probably dancing widely in his chest. Now that Mike knew the truth, it was obvious. No wonder Jezebel had had her suspicions for years. The real question was, how could Will not notice anything?

Will offered them a tour of the house and Mike remembered why this place was so impressive. It was huge. Eight bedrooms, five bathrooms, a lounge room as big as their first stair, an art room for Will and a patio with a Jacuzzi, a bar and a large turquoise swimming pool. The two hectares garden was also very nicely arranged with its flowers and fruit trees. You could hear the crickets sing in the branches, making the whole place very peaceful. There was also a small private beach that was accessible via a dirt path.

Will paraded around the house, popping cherry tomatoes in his mouth as he went. Thirty five years ago, Mike had befriended a small

boy alone on a swing. Thirty five years later, that same little boy had morphed into a modern Gatsby. No one in his acquaintances was as accomplished as Will Byers. He was the embodiment of the American ideal of the self made man. A pornstar with the lifestyle of an English dandy.

As it was expected, the three children immediately changed into their bathing suits and jumped in the pool while Ravi made cocktails for everyone. Jezebel took a Martini, relaxing in one of the numerous lounge chairs. She didn't say anything but Mike knew she was quite content being there. It was a real vacation. One they didn't have often. And God knew, she needed it. Mike didn't leave his blouse and jeans, uncomfortable with the idea of showing skin in front of Will, busy playing with the kids. Mike's eyes focused particularly on Nate and how the boy laughed and searched the older man's touch. The way he flirted with Will, unknowingly to Will's attention, was disturbing at best. But Mike didn't say anything and observed in silence the scene unfold before him. A younger, hotter, version of him. A chill ran down his spine and he averted his eyes.

The afternoon passed in a blur.

At the end of the day, Will joined Mike on the patio, offering him a glass of whisky that he accepted. On the horizon, the sun was slowly setting on the sea, forming a cloud of red and pink into the sky. It was hypnotic.

"This house is gorgeous," Mike said.

"Thanks. I'm glad you like it."

Mike turned to check on Will. The man had changed into a white shirt, his hair still wet from his nautical fun. Even in such a basic outfit, Will looked fine as Hell and Mike's heart quickened. The color of the shirt complimented beautiful the golden hue of his tan. Will suddenly bent to the left, brushing past Mike, and pushed on a button, tuning on the hot tub. Mike swallowed in apprehension. He felt Will's eyes search his as he removed his white shirt, revealing his athletic body once more. On anyone else, the gesture would have been casual. But Will was an expert at disrobing and the effect on Mike was immediate. His body burst in heat and he looked away in

shame.

"Care to join me?" Will asked in a low, inviting voice, as he slipped into the tub. Fortunately, he was still wearing his trunks or Mike's heart couldn't have held it.

"I don't know..." Mike answered, his face flushed with embarrassment.

"Come on," Will urged, "You didn't leave your jeans all day. Come relax a bit," Mike sighed and hesitated again. Will was looking at him expectantly, waiting, "Come on, Wheeler. Strip!" he insisted, splashing him playfully.

The bubbles in the tub were making so much noise, it was almost covering their voices. After a moment of indecision, he began to unbutton his blouse with trembling fingers, sensing Will's burning eyes on his every gesture. The blouse fell to the ground, uncovering a white, hairy belly that was way too loose for Mike's liking.

"Behold the sexiness of the dad bod," he joked darkly.

Will smiled, "You look fine. Nothing a bit of exercise couldn't fix. Like most guys our age."

"You look damn good..." Mike muttered, stumbling awkwardly into the tub, on the opposite side to make sure they wouldn't touch.

Will shrugged, taking a sip of his whisky from the cup holder, "Don't exactly have a choice. My body's my work tool. I gotta look good if I want to sell it."

Mike nodded even if he didn't like how Will talked about his body.

"Besides," Will continued, "I work out ten hours a week to keep this body in shape. And I don't eat pizza!" Will's feet touched his ankle and Mike jumped, a small thrill running in parts of his body that remained dormant most of the year, "Sorry," Will apologized, not looking sorry at all.

Mike shook his head and swallowed. How could a single touch ignite so much fire? Will took a cigarette from a pack nearby and Mike

watched as he slipped it between his lips to light it.

"You don't eat pizza but you do smoke."

Will shrugged, taking a drag and exhaling the smoke, "I have my vices."

"Too many of them. You smoke too much. You drink too much. You fuck too much."

"I have an excuse for that one. It's my job."

"Yes, it is..." Mike hissed, not able to hide the disdain in his tone.

"Oh, don't start!" Will huffed.

There was another moment of silence. Mike tried to relax into the Jacuzzi but was having a hard time succeeding. He wasn't much of a hot tub fan. The water was too warm and the bubbles smelled funny. He moved a bit, trying to find a more comfortable position, as far away from Will's body as possible.

"I'll try to exercise more," Mike said, "I feel bigger than Jez when she was pregnant with our kids! It's gross."

Will chuckled, "You'll always be the sexiest man in the world to me!" There was a gentleness in his voice that made Mike chock.

"Please, don't flirt." He really didn't need that.

"I'm not flirting."

"Yes, you are. You're always flirting and my wife is just across."

"Can she hear us?" Will asked smugly.

Mike shook his head, "You're unbelievable!" He cleared his throat, "Speaking of that, care to tell me why you told my son about us?"

Will frowned, "About what?"

"Our breaking up circumstances."

Will took another drag and puffed the smoke toward Mike slowly, "The kid was curious. I answered his questions. Evasively."

"I don't like that. Please don't do it again. I don't want you to talk to Nate about us!"

"Why? Ashamed?"

"No. But my private life shouldn't concern him. Only us."

"Ok. For my defense, I didn't want to answer but he was being very persistent."

"Yes, do that. Blame it on my kid."

"I'm not blaming him! I'm just telling you why I told him what I did."

Mike rolled his eyes but didn't say anything. Silence returned and Mike watched Will pull repeatedly on his reducing cigarette, watching the orange tip slip between those lips. Smoking should have never been so erotic. Will met his eyes and Mike swallowed, uncomfortable. He was getting hard.

"Congratulations again for your movie, by the way," he said, trying to kill his boner with small talk.

"Thanks," Will nodded, finishing his cigarette.

"I really wanted to call but I've been awfully busy with work," Mike added although it was a lie. He could have called Will a hundred times already, "Sorry."

Will shook his head, "It's ok. I was busy too."

Mike nodded, "Why didn't you tell me anything? This sounds like a really important project for you."

Will shrugged, "I know you don't like hearing about my job. I didn't want to make you uncomfortable."

"Still. You could have told me. I'm not a stranger..."

“Have you seen it?” He sounded hopeful.

Mike shook his head, “Not yet. It’ll depend on the level of clothes you’re wearing in it.”

“I don’t act in it. Besides, why would it matter... It’s not like you’ve never seen me without clothes before!”

“Hasn’t anybody else?” Mike answered in mild mockery.

Will kicked his leg again and Mike flinched at the contact, “Blablabla. I’m not naked in it, if that can reassure you. And I’m not fucking anyone either.”

“I don’t know if I should feel relieved or terribly disappointed,” Mike noted.

Will raised an eyebrow, “I didn’t know you missed my cock this much!”

Mike rolled his eyes, “Still obsessed with your cock, I see.”

“Why shouldn’t I be?” Will said, shrugging, “It’s worth millions after all.”

“Such a modest man, you are...”

“Have you looked around you?”

“If I didn’t know you, I’d say you have something to compensate with that *huge* house!” Mike joked.

Will smirked, “What does your ass have to say about that?”

Mike shook his head. Will could become extremely crude when he had a bit too much to drink, “Will. My wife is over there. Behave.” Will winked, unaffected by Mike’s warning, “Speaking about cocks, how many have you sucked in that tub exactly?” He was still disturbed by the heavy smell.

“Why? Are you offering?”

"No. I just want to know in how many liters of junk I'm currently dipping my body into. It smells weird."

"That's the disinfectant," Will said, "To answer your question, zero. I'm not an idiot. I knew you were coming with your family. I got the whole place entirely cleaned before your arrival. I'm not a pig, Mike."

"I know."

"Then please don't insult me."

"Sorry."

Will shook his head slowly. He looked offended, "And for your information, I haven't shot anything in that tub for a year. So no junk."

"Not even yours?"

"Not even mine."

"I'm impressed," Mike noted and Will stuck his tongue out at him.

There was a moment of silence again. Both sipped on their glass. Will wasn't looking at him. In the sky, the sun had completely disappeared into the sea and the stars were beginning to pop.

"Who's Adam?" Mike asked after a while, taking Will off guard.

Will's eyebrow rose again in surprise, "I thought you hadn't seen it?"

"I didn't. I just saw an interview of you speaking about it."

"Mmh mmh..."

"So? Who's Adam?"

"He's just a character."

"Cut the bullshit, Byers. The plot is awfully familiar. A pornstar in love with a regular guy. Really, Will? Is this why you didn't tell me anything? Because you wrote a movie about us and didn't want me to freak out?" He was losing control. Blame it on the disinfectant and

the whisky.

Will's expression hadn't faltered a bit, "Is it? Is the story about Mike and Will?"

"Don't try to beat around th-

"-is it, *Micheal*? As far as I know, the names of my characters are Eric and Adam."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's just a pretext and you know it!" Mike dismissed him. He hated it when Will played those games and said his name just to pull on his leg. He'd had this childish habit ever since they were kids and Mike didn't have the patience anymore. He already had kids at home, three of them, and didn't need one more to add insult to injury.

Will shook his head, "You're reading way too much into this. It's just a piece of fiction."

"I'm not. A bartender falling in love with a pornstar!" Mike huffed, "You couldn't have made it more obvious. You should have told me you're still fantasizing about us!"

"Are you a bartender?" Will cut him off.

"No -"

"-then it's not you."

"Doesn't need to. It's all the same."

"No, it's not. You were never a bartender. You can't even serve a glass of wine correctly!"

"That is simply not true!"

"Yes, it is!"

"No!"

"Mike, please..."

"You wrote that movie about us, I know you did!" He was so taken by their exchange that his voice had grown significantly louder and Will gestured behind them in distress. Mike swallowed, checking from the corner of his eye his wife's whereabouts. It really wasn't the moment for Jezebel to hear that conversation, "You wrote that movie about us, I know you did!" he repeated, his voice ushered down.

"If that makes you happy to believe that..." Will conceded in pity.

"I don't believe anything."

"-you should have told me you missed me this much," Will continued in the same tone, "I would have indulged you, you know."

"Oh shut up!" Mike exclaimed.

"-taken care of that little frustration!"

"Shut up! I'm not frustrated!" Mike yelled in a controlled whisper.

"If you really need a fix, you can still Google me. I'm everywhere. And I bottom now!" he said in a wink.

Mike huffed bitterly, "Yeah... That sure never happened with me..." Yes, he was still mad about that.

"It's not too late!" Will said in a low, seductive voice. He was looking at Mike with hungry eyes, "You need only ask," he continued, falling forward toward Mike to whisper, "And I'll bend over for you. Anywhere you want. I've been told I moan beautifully!"

Mike's erection stirred. That was bad. Bad, bad, bad, "Please, stop. You're being gross," he spat to hide his discomfort.

Will was looking at him with repressed anger, "As always."

Mike shook his head. A part of him wished Will would just act on those words instead of staying unnervingly silent. After a few seconds, Will finally looked away, pushing his empty glass of whisky back into the cup holder.

"Wanna go for a swim?" he proposed, brutally changing the subject,

as if he hadn't made obscene propositions to Mike just moments ago.

"What? Now?"

"Yes, now. The water is very nice at this hour."

"I don't think so..."

Will rolled his eyes, "Come on! What's gotten into you? You love swimming! And you remained shackled to your seat all day! Like you were afraid to drown on the concrete!"

"I wasn't in the mood."

"Come on, Mike."

"Maybe later but not now. Besides, I need to go give Julie her bath. It's getting late."

Will shook his head slowly, "Who's using pretexts now?" he whispered, cold and serious. Mike flinched but didn't answer, still avoiding the other man.

Will observed him in silence for a minute before standing up from the bench, "I didn't write a movie about us," he said "For the sole reason that there is no us. Hasn't been for a very long time," He flung his leg above the tub onto the small stairs and bent to whisper in Mike's ear very slowly, "You made sure of that when you chose to impregnate a woman behind my back."

He darted his tongue out to lick at Mike's cheek obscenely and pulled away, disappearing behind the bushes, leaving Mike alone and trembling. He wasn't so sure it was a good idea to have come after all.

Will stormed into the house, trying to calm his ragged breath and racing heart. He was an idiot. A complete fool. What was he thinking? Mike was married! And he was losing control like a beginner. He pinched the bridge of his nose, inhaling deeply. This was a huge mistake.

"Will?"

He frowned and turned to check on the intruder. Nate was looking at him curiously. He sniffled, forcing a smile to plaster his face, "Hey kiddo!"

"Are you ok?" the boy asked with a worried expression.

"Sure I am! What's up?"

Nate shrugged, "Nothing. I was just looking for you."

"Well, I'm here!"

Nate smiled and Will replied with the same expression, observing the boy with a pang in his heart. The boy for whom Mike had betrayed him fifteen years ago. He could still see Mike's anxious scowl when he announced him he had gotten the girl he met at that stupid Fair pregnant. It was the day everything fell apart. Will had tried hating the boy. He had tried so hard. But he couldn't. Nate was such a sweet kid. He was the child of the man he loved. He was innocent. So was Jezebel. All of this was Mike's fault. He was the one who decided to go play Prince and Princesses. Even after all these years, Will couldn't forgive. His heart was still too heavy.

"Did you paint that?" Nate suddenly asked, pointing at a painting hanging on the wall behind him. It was a portrait of his mother.

"Yes," he said.

"It's beautiful. You're super talented."

The compliment brought a smile to Will's lips, "Thank you." Nate beamed at him. He looked happy, "Did you have a nice day?"

Nate nodded, "It was great, yes."

"I'm glad."

"I saw you had jet skis," Nate said again.

"Do you like them?"

“I do.”

Will nodded, “We can go for a ride tomorrow if you want!”

Nate’s eyes widened in excitement, “Oh I’d love that!”

Will smiled softly, “That’s settled then!”

Nate beamed at him, looking at Will with those deep brown eyes. His father’s eyes. Will swallowed, his heart heavy again. He extended his arm to ruffle the boy’s hair gently, chuckling at the puppy expression on Nate’s face. At least one of them was happy to spend some time with him.

This invitation had been a huge mistake.

Notes for the Chapter:

Let me know what you thought of it :)

4. Thwarted plans

Summary for the Chapter:

"Across from them, walled up away from the pathetic show that were his parents, Nate watched the romantic exchange with his heart in the back of his throat. It was just a short kiss but it left him internally panting. He wondered how they felt. His only experience with kissing was during a school ball when he was thirteen with a girl he didn't even like. He hadn't liked it. It had felt weird. Would it be different with Will? Jessy suggested he kissed a boy once, just to see the difference but Nate wasn't so sure. Will wasn't a boy. Will was a man. Surely, kissing Will would feel completely different than kissing a sixteen year-old."

Notes for the Chapter:

Here comes the new chapter!

WARNING: sex, language and realistic situations.

Nate woke up with the rising sun, a smile on his face. He had spent the most beautiful day, the day before. The Island was magnificent. Plus *Will*. He bit his lip, letting his hand dig under the waistband of his pyjamas. He was already hard and thinking of Will made even more blood rush down, swelling the bulge. He curled his fingers around himself and began to stroke, eyes still closed. Images of Will invaded his head as they always did but this time it was even more palpable than most days. He focused on the memories of Will the day before in the pool. The ways his hands had touched his shoulders and waist as Will threw him into the water to play. How big and warm they felt. How big and warm they'd feel around his cock... He focused on the sensation of Will's hip bucking into him. His abs... His beautiful body... His lips... He moaned, arched, and came into the damp obscurity of his room.

After catching his breath, smiling to himself, he remembered that he was going on a ride with Will today. He jumped out of bed, excited

and hurried to shower, spending another good ten minutes thinking about Will's hands on his shoulders as the hot water streamed on his head and back. He stayed in the bathroom a moment, trying to comb his hair the most suiting way, putting cologne on his cheeks, chest and armpits to smell a bit more like a man and less like a sweating adolescent. Maybe Will would notice. He shook his head, he was being ridiculous. But if he rode with Will on the same jet - please, let this be the case, please! - he'd be physically close to the man and he wanted to smell good. To smell like an adult, like the men Will noticed. But he didn't want to smell too strong either. He didn't want Will to think he had put that cologne *specifically* for their ride. He nibbled his bottom lip and stared at his reflexion in the mirror still covered in steam. His hair was a bit of a mess, curtsy to his father's genes and he was desperately skinny, far from the muscular men Will seemed to favour.

He sighed, pouting at the boyish face looking back. He couldn't wait to grow old. His youth disgusted him.

The house was still silent when he climbed down the stairs, hearing them crack under his feet. From his spot, he could see the swimming pool through the large windows in the hall. He blinked, squinting his eyes at a flesh-colored silhouette moving underwater. A human body. He sniffled, taking the last step to walk to the window and check the pool from a better angle, pushing his hands against the pristine glass.

His breath hitched in his throat, his fingers shaking on the cool glass as he watched Will's body reach the side of the pool, finishing a lap underwater. He tried to breath and swallow but nothing happened. Will turned around to make a lap in the other direction and Nate's eyes froze on his buttocks and spreading legs as he swam. Blood rushed southward again and he felt his flesh harden in his boxers. For the third time. He bit his lip and pressed his legs together, urging his erection away.

He stayed like that a couple of minutes before he decided to leave his spot and pull the sliding door open to the terrace, walking into the sun by the pool. The smell of chlorine reached his nostrils and he could hear the sound of Will's body moving in the water. The air was already heavy with heat even at such an early hour. He grabbed an apple on the table and bit into it, turning his attention back on Will

who was swimming back in his direction.

The man reached the side of the pool and emerged from the water, smiling at Nate.

"Hey kiddo," he said, drops of water falling on his nose and lips, "You're up early!"

Nate was grateful for the apple he had in hand or he would have turned into a blushing, stammering mess. Will looked absolutely sinful emerging from the pool like that and his poor body was throbbing all over.

He nodded, munching on a piece of apple before he did something very stupid like kissing those pink lips.

Will smiled again and pushed on his hands to lift himself off the pool. Nate followed his every movement. His eyes fell on the drops falling from Will's wet body to his well defined abs. They trail downwards. The day before, Will had worn larger swimsuits when he played with them in the pool, hiding most of his legs and buttocks, probably out of modesty or some stupid thing like that. The briefs Will was wearing at that moment were black, short and tight, leaving almost nothing to the imagination - not that Nate needed to *imagine* anything but it certainly didn't help calm his raging hormones. His eyes trailed up again and he lost himself in the contemplation of his waxed chest. How he wanted to clap his hands on those tattooed shoulders and wrap his lip around that pink nipple, grazing it with his tongue. A moan almost left him as he saw a drop fall from the nipple to land on the waistband of his briefs. It was so tight, it was difficult to miss the bulge resting just under the material. He swallowed. His mind immediately conveyed an image of this bulge without the briefs and he thought he would faint.

"Hungry?" Will asked in a smile, oblivious to Nate's inner turmoil.

Nate blinked, his eyes glued to Will's back as the man walked past him, the outline of Will's firm buttocks was fully visible through those damn briefs. A sigh left his drying lips. Oh, he *was* hungry. Famished even, but not for the food on the table.

He joined Will, taking a seat across from him.

The man was already pouring some coffee in a cup. Nate scanned the table in search of something edible. Back bread, beetroot juice, orange juice, almond spread, organic peanut butter, avocados, eggs, goat cheese, almond milk, granola... No industrial jam, no Nutella, no processed cereal, no bacon... This sure looked nothing like the breakfast table at their home. He opted for the organic peanut butter and a slice of bread - the only two familiar candidates on the table. Will was observing him with a small smirk. Nate's heart fluttered.

"You find anything you like?" Will asked.

Nate swallowed, "I'm good."

"Sorry, I don't have Nutella or any other industrial stuff I know you kids like. Ravi bought something similar though. I can go fetch it if you want."

Nate shook his head, spreading the peanut butter on his toast, "No, I'm fine. Don't worry about it."

Silence settled as they ate. The peanut butter was good, tastier. It was different from the sugary stuff he had at home. And the bread was thicker, making him full after just two toasts. This healthy food wasn't so bad. Will was eating what looked to be oatmeal with honey, a glass of beetroot juice next to his bowl. He let his eyes wander around until they fell on the bar by the pool. Heat rushed to his face and he felt his cheeks burn. One of his favorite scenes from Will's movies had been shot there, some blond guy bent over that bar as Will thrust behind him. How many times had Nate watched that scene, fantasized on it, imagined himself instead of the guy. He wasn't much into penetration but anything involving Will and carnal activity was good to take. Besides, Will looked like he knew what he was doing so it *had* to feel good. He almost moaned at the thought.

"Still up for our ride?" Will suddenly asked.

Nate blinked, confused. A ride? Yes, he was *more* than ready for a ride! He swallowed and frowned, snapping back to reality. Will was looking at him expectantly, his eyebrow raised at his flushed face.

Oh, the ride. As in, *jet ski ride*... Not the... *other* kind of ride he had in mind - and body. He bit his lip, trying to ignore the weight between his legs.

“Yeah, of course!” he said in a wavering voice.

Will winked at him, munching on his granola and Nate felt his heart miss a beat. He would do something stupid someday... It was passing close more and more frequently. It was a miracle Will didn't notice anything!

They stayed in comfortable companionship for twenty minutes, enjoying breakfast and the gentle summer morning warmth. Will asked him about his art project, giving him tips and anecdotes regarding his own paintings and Nate listened with rapt attention. It was nice. Calm, natural. Will talked easily to him and listened to what he had to say.

After thirty minutes, sounds like those coming from a chicken coop erupted from inside the house and Nate sighed, looking down. His parents emerged onto the terrace, arguing as they always did as soon as the sun was up. They ignored their host and continued to bicker, Julie popping through her dad's legs with a huge smile, running to greet Will. Nate flared his nostrils. Their moment of intimacy was over.

At first, Will didn't say anything. He stared at the couple arguing with unraveling patience and waited until both had seated to test the waters.

“Is everything alright?” he tried.

Jezebel puckered her lips, her eyes down on the table as if repressing a jab.

“We're good,” she answered.

The silence that followed was not. It was heavy and oppressive. The kind of silence that followed broken couples everywhere they went and no one dared say a word in fear of antagonizing them any further. Mike was sighing repeatedly, pouring himself a cup of coffee

while his wife buttered some toast for Julie.

After a good five minutes of this, Will spoke again.

“Are you sure?” he insisted.

Jezebel swallowed behind her pressed lips, “Mike forgot his sleep apnea machine,” she announced, still without looking at any of them as if she was trying to make them disappear.

Mike rolled his eyes, “I wasn’t going to take that horrible thing here! With the humidity and the heat!”

“The doctor said you must have it with you all the time,” she replied, her firm voice veiling annoyance, “Or do you want to risk another aneurysm?” she turned to look at him with angry defiance.

Will blinked, alarmed, “What? What aneurysm?”

“Last year, your best friend woke up blind from a brain aneurysm. He stayed at the hospital all day and remained almost blind from one eye for a full week!” she explained, her eyes still fixed on Mike, as if challenging him to say otherwise.

Will swallowed. What was she talking about? This sounded like a big deal. And Will hadn’t known... Mike hadn’t said anything. Why hadn’t Mike said anything?

Mike sighed, “Jez, please...”

She didn’t look away, “The doctor said he suffers from sleep apnea, mostly due to his lack of exercise and lifestyle...”

“I’m fine! I’m not obese!” Mike loudly protested.

“You need to pay better attention to your health!” she attacked again, “You’re only forty-two with the heart and lungs of an eighty year-old man!” she yelled, losing her restraints to outrage.

Mike flared his nostrils and looked away.

At the table, everyone was quiet, looking at the exchange with

contrition. Will was at a loss for words. What were they talking about? Why hadn't Mike told him? He had stayed blind for a full week and Will hadn't known?! What if something bad happened? What if Mike had lost his sight for good? Did they even realize how serious this was and how he should have been made aware of it?

Julie was nibbling on her toast. She was young but was somewhat understanding the gravity of her parent's discussion. She probably was used to the constant fighting too. Will shook his head at the thought. Nate was sulking in his plate, waiting for the storm to pass.

At the very same moment, Ravi made his morning entrance onto the terrace.

"Good morning," he greeted.

When no one answered him, he quickly realized something was amiss, especially when looking at the cold tension that transpired between Mike and his wife.

"Did I miss anything?" he tried to chuckle awkwardly.

"No."

Husband and Wife had answered at the same time and Ravi nodded, walking toward Will to kiss his partner, keeping away from the turbulent duo.

"Morning babe," Ravi said, pecking Will's lips and Will answered with a smile.

Across from them, walled up away from the pathetic show that were his parents, Nate watched the romantic exchange with his heart in the back of his throat. It was just a short kiss but it left him internally panting. He wondered how they felt. His only experience with kissing was during a school ball when he was thirteen with a girl he didn't even like. He hadn't liked it. It had felt weird. Would it be different with Will? Jessy suggested he kissed a boy once, just to see the difference but Nate wasn't so sure. Will wasn't a boy. Will was a man. Surely, kissing Will would feel completely different than kissing a sixteen year-old.

Will's phone suddenly rang, putting an end to the awkward silence.

"Sorry," Will apologized, looking at his screen before walking away with his phone against his ear.

It was Natasha, Will's friend and co-worker.

"Hey Nat," Will greeted her as he walked back into the house for some quiet.

"Hey," she answered at the other side of the line, "Sorry for bothering you during your vacation with your *special someone*," Will rolled his eyes at this, "But I have a bit of a situation..."

"What's wrong?"

"I may have forgotten my script in your study. I can't find it anywhere. Would you mind checking?"

Will frowned, making his way to the study, his phone still stuck to his ear. He scanned the room in search of a folder.

"Do you remember where you left it?"

"In a drawer maybe..."

He secured the phone between his jaw and shoulder and opened the drawers of his desk one after the other, "What were you doing here with your script anyway?"

"I used the room for auditions," she explained, "You have a very nice desk."

He rolled his eyes and continued to rummage through the files for a couple of minutes until his hand came across a heavy pile at the bottom of the drawer, as well as... something else.

"Found it!" he exclaimed, "This and what I suppose to be the audition tool!" he mumbled, lifting a purple strap-on to his face with an amused pout.

“Aw, I knew I’d forgotten it!”

Will shook his head, “Fortunately you left it somewhere safe from children!”

There was a slight reproach in his voice that she picked.

“Will...”

“You knew I had kids coming!”

He heard her roll her eyes, “Come on, it’s not the end of the world! Their parents probably do worse, knowing Mikey as I do!”

“They don’t do porn. They don’t have to make the extra effort to prove they’re harmless and can be trusted around children!”

“Will...”

“Their mother is convinced I’m a dirty perv. So is their dad! You don’t have any idea what would have happened if they’d found that thing here! If *Julie* had found it!” He felt ill just thinking about it.

“Are you telling me that you rid your entire house of sex toys?”

“I locked them away, yes. To make sure they wouldn’t find them. I don’t exactly fancy seeing their seven year-old daughter running around the house with an anchor butt plug!”

“You know, for someone who has an educative channel about sex and promotes safe sex all the time on TV you sure turn into a raging prude whenever this family is concerned!” she joked.

He paused. She was right.

“You know what your problem is?” she continued.

“Enlighten me.”

“You try too hard to be accepted by them. By Mike. If they don’t accept you for who you are, they’re not worth the trouble.”

He clenched his jaw. He didn’t like being lectured.

“Anyway, do you want me to mail them over?” he proposed, changing the subject.

“That’s the thing,” she said after a short hesitation, “I’m shooting the scene today...”

He rolled his eyes, “Seriously?”

“Yes...”

“And you couldn’t check you had that script before?”

“I forgot!”

He sighed, “Where are you now?”

“Miami. We’re shooting this afternoon.”

He pinched his nose between two fingers, “Do you want me to bring them over?”

“Could you do that?”

“If I must.”

“You’d be a dear.”

He rolled his eyes, “Alright, I’ll be there in two hours.”

He hung up and locked the folder and strap-on into the massive wooden wardrobe on his left. He’d get them back later. In the meantime, the only thing that mattered was to keep them away from his guests.

The ambiance at the table hadn’t really changed when he returned on the terrace. Mike and Jezebel weren’t looking at each other and the animosity coming from the two was still very palpable. It almost made Will’s nostrils burn. To think Mike had left him for this glorious relationship still baffled him to this day. Fate had a wicked sense of irony. Not that it was any better when they were dating (well, it was

in *some* aspects anyway)... But Mike and Jez... It was over before it even started.

“Is everything ok?” Ravi asked.

Will nodded, “Yes. Nat called. She left important stuff here. I have to make a quick trip to Miami. It shouldn’t be too long,” he paused to look at Nate at the other side of the table, “Sorry kiddo but we’ll have to postpone our little ride to later.”

On his left, Mike strangled himself with his eggs and swept his napkin across his mouth to calm his breath, “Ride? What ride?” he croaked.

“I promised to take him for a jet ski tour of the island,” he simply answered.

Mike’s eyes widened, “And when exactly were you going to ask for our permission?”

Will shrugged, “I’m asking now!” He didn’t give Mike time to respond, “Anyway, if I go now, I can be in Miami around eleven. It will probably take me the rest of the morning. Don’t wait for me for lunch.”

Ravi nodded. Jezebel was still too cross with her husband to react but Mike was livid. He knew Natasha and knew where Will was going. Will ignored him. He wasn’t in the mood for a scene. His eyes fell on Nate again. The boy’s head hung low. He was disappointed.

“I’ll make it up to you, Nate,” he said in a soft voice to the kid, “I promise.”

“You’re not taking my son on that Hellish machine!” Mike warned, “It’s way too dangerous.”

“Dad!” Nate complained, temporarily leaving his mutism.

Will shook his head, “We’ll talk about that later. I have to go. Besides, Nate is old enough to make his own decisions. And he’ll be with me.”

This didn't calm Mike who rose from his chair to give more countenance to his words, "Yes! With you! The last time you took me for a ride, I fell flat in a wave and dislocated my shoulder!"

"That's because you have no sense of balance, darling!" Will answered as he walked back into the house, abandoning Mike to his outrage by himself.

He arrived at the studio a bit after eleven thirty. Natasha was waiting for him with a huge smile. She was a short, pink-haired woman. Tattoo aficionados like Will. A porn director and actress like Will. They had met at a porn convention fourteen years earlier and co-founded Wizardry productions together. If he managed all things gay, she was in charge of the lesbian part of their business, writing and shooting what she liked to call "real lesbian porn with real lesbians" far from the cliché of the mainstream industry she loathed. She was Will's best friend. Differently than Mike. Sometimes more than Mike, Natasha being in the same company, same business, same world. They understood each other and supported each other. Something Mike had stopped doing the day he said yes to the priest in that church and changed his first diaper.

"You're a doll!" she said, jumping to hug him.

"Here," he said with a chuckle, handing her the bag with the folder and strap-on.

"Thanks! Did you try it?" she joked.

"No. Didn't exactly have the time for that. Or the company."

"That's too bad."

"Yes, I would have loved to replace my cock with that thing!" he mocked.

"I'm sure you would!" she winked.

He followed her to the cafeteria for a cup of coffee, passing in front of half naked actors en route for their scene. Most of them recognized

him and greeted him warmly.

“With whom are you shooting?” he asked, taking the plastic cup from the machine.

They were alone in the room.

She mimicked him, “A new girl. Her name’s Stella. She’s super cute.”

He nodded, “Stella, uhm?”

“That’s a stage name.”

“You don’t say!” he gently mocked, taking a sip of coffee.

She playfully hit his arm, “Honestly, she’s cool.”

“Newbie?”

“No. She did three movies before. And she has a solo channel too. That’s how I found her!” she winked.

He chuckled into his cup, “Was it for this Stella that you used my desk?” he asked with a smirk.

“Yes. Very conclusive by the way. The contrast between skin and wood is perfect on camera!”

His smirk widened, “I know. I choose my furniture wisely!”

She chuckled, “Is Ravi ok?”

“Oh yes. He’s back from a month with his family. Two weeks I shared with him.”

“With uncle Salim?” she mocked, poking her tongue out.

“Unfortunately...” he answered with a clenched jaw.

“I mentioned him to Sarah. She wanted to pat you on the back.”

“Yeah... I needed loads during my stay. That man is repulsive. His wife isn’t even allowed to talk without his permission. And you can’t

imagine the number of homophobic jabs Ravi and I got. Dozens per meal. This plus the constant English rain. I had a blast.”

“Aw, poor baby!” she cooed before changing the subject to something more serious, “How is Mikey? They arrived yesterday, didn’t they?”

Will raised his brow, “Yes. And still the same.”

“And his lovely wife?”

“Still very lovely when you like the pouting and screaming king of thing.”

“Oh come on, Will!” she rolled her eyes. For a reason that he couldn’t quite understand, she had a weird crush on Jezebel.

“They fight all the time. They had a fight yesterday when they arrived, then before dinner, after dinner, before going to bed and during breakfast this morning! If couple fighting was a recognized discipline, they’d be ready for the Olympics!”

“You’re being mean.”

“Nope! I’m just telling the truth.”

“It’s sad,” Nat conceded, “They’re stuck. My parents were like that too.”

“Yeah... It’s too bad.”

She nudged, “But come on, be honest. You’re happy to see Mike, aren’t you?”

He shrugged, “I am. It always hurts but I’m glad he’s here. His kids are adorable too.”

“How’s Nate?”

“He’s a teenager.”

“How old is he now? The last time I saw him, he was in middle school! I remember how polite he was with his little school bag and

uniform. He called me *Madame!*” she said, laughing at the memory, “*Madame!*”

“He’ll be sixteen in a couple of months if I’m not mistaken.”

Her eyes widened, “Wow! Time does fly! Does he still look like Mike? I remember the resemblance.”

Will nodded, “Oh yes! The resemblance is uncanny!”

“Must be hard for you,” she noted softly.

He shrugged dismissively, “Not necessarily. I can make the difference. Mike is Mike. Nate is just a kid. I don’t understand why people expect me to be confused. I find that rather insulting.”

“Is he gay?” she suddenly asked, her voice a bit darker.

Will breathed through his nose, “Honestly? I don’t know. Mike has his doubts. So does Jez. I tried to talk to Nate. But I don’t know. He hasn’t shown any interest in anyone. He never mentioned a girl he liked or a boy. So I don’t know. And it’s not my place to pry.”

“His mother must be delighted...”

Will shook his head, “She loves her son. No matter what people say. She’d accept it even if it doesn’t align with her dreams of a big traditional family. She’s a good mother.”

Natasha didn’t answer right away. She was observing Will with a small, tender smile.

“What?” Will snapped, feeling scrutinized.

“You’re defending her. That’s cute!”

“Oh shut up!” he wrinkled his nose in annoyance.

She laughed.

As he was about to leave the studio, he heard noises coming from one

of the sets. Voices. They were rising from Room 3. Usually Will didn't pick on this sort of thing. Noises from shooting rooms were to be expected. Especially when shooting sex scenes. In this particular case though, it sounded like an argument. Arguments on sets were never a good thing.

He frowned and took a few steps back toward the room. As the owner of the company, it was his duty to check that everything was going smoothly. Particularly in a very humanely complex industry such as porn.

He opened the door and peaked in.

A scene was being shot. Jerry, the director and a close friend of Will's, was yelling his orders from his chair, the technical staff working around him with all their equipment. In the center of the room, two naked men were waiting. One of them was Francis Pittsburger. They hadn't really worked together but he was one of Jerry's favorite tops. Will didn't like him very much. He was a good-looking guy but a real douche. Once or twice, Will had heard him call on a fellow bottom actor for not being *clean enough*, going as far as to throw a tantrum on set over a small accident and properly humiliate his partner. They'd had a long talk after that, Will reminding him that if he couldn't take a bit of poop on his cock, he shouldn't be doing porn at all. Or be a top. Hadn't he been so popular in Jerry's films, Will would have already fired him.

The other man was younger and new. Will had never seen him before. He looked uncomfortable, hunched on himself as if ashamed. Francis was looking at him, his face contorted in anger.

"Come on, Francis," Jerry was saying, "Don't be a jerk!"

"I'm not being a jerk!" Francis vividly protested, "We've been at this for over an hour now and nothing is working. I don't have all day! I'm supposed to be at my niece's birthday by three! I won't be late because this idiot can't relax and open his ass properly!"

"Fran..."

"Don't we have vodka or something? Or poppers!"

Jerry was about to answer but Will beat him.

“No!” he said, making his presence known, “We’re not drugging actors in this company!”

Silence fell. Francis looked down, lips parted in annoyance at the sight of Will. The younger man’s eyes widened in shock when he recognized the big Boss and he almost tried to bury himself into the floor. Jerry turned to look at him, opening his arms in a warm greeting.

“Will! I didn’t know you’d stop by! I thought you were too busy cooing with your beloved Micheal!”

Will rolled his eyes, “Mike and I are not *cooing*, Jerry!”

Jerry dismissed him, “The importance is you believe it!”

Will ignored him, “What’s going on here?”

Jerry sighed, “A few script mismanagements... Nothing the matter!”

Francis cut him off, “We’re supposed to shoot but this guy here can’t take a damn cock without crying like a baby!” He turned toward the other man who was still looking at his feet, “If you knew you couldn’t do it, you shouldn’t have bothered coming at all and waste our time! Mine especially!” he wrinkled his nose in disgust.

“Enough!” Will shouted in a hard voice. He didn’t like his tone and how he was shamelessly harassing his partner in front of everyone. Again.

The other man was shaking like a leaf. Around them, people had gone silent. Will wasn’t done.

“That’s enough,” he continued, “Who exactly do you think you are? Talking down to the actors in *my* company! Bullying is not allowed here. You should know that by now.”

Francis opened his mouth to protest, “But boss, he’s wasting everyone’s time!”

“You’re fired!” Will spat.

Francis’s eyes widened at the shock, “What?”

Jerry tried to intervene, “Will, please.”

But Will wasn’t listening and kept his glare fixed on the man.

“I’ve warned you enough times. That’s the last straw. We don’t want Divas here, Pittsburgher. We want people who can play fair to others. Make their screen partners comfortable and safe. Something you have never done if I recall correctly. Take your things and leave.”

It took Francis a moment to realize Will was being serious. He sent him a death glare and stormed out, passing in front of the shocked staff.

“No, wait!” Jerry tried one last time.

The door slammed behind them and the room plunged into awkward silence. Will was still trembling from his rush of adrenaline.

“Great, awesome,” Jerry said after a full minute, “Thanks, Will. Now I have to find another actor for a shooting only booked for today! Thanks a lot.”

Will sighed, “Sorry, Jer but that asshole saw it coming. You know it was bound to happen.”

“Yes, but you could have fired him tomorrow! I needed him today!”

“Sorry. What scene were you supposed to shoot?”

“Anal. But it’s kind of sunk now. I can’t possibly shoot a penetration scene without my actor to do the penetration part!”

Will sighed. Jerry kept shaking his head dejectedly.

“Would it help if I did it?” Will slurred with a smirk.

Jerry frowned, “You mean *replace* Francis?”

“Yes.”

Around them, people began to whisper.

“You’d do that?” Jerry asked, a bit incredulous.

Will shrugged, “I fired your actor. That’s the least I can do,” he turned to check on the other man who was still frozen on his spot, “Would it be ok for you too? Or do you want to stop? We’re not forcing you to continue if you don’t feel it.”

The man looked up and stared at Will as if he were seeing him for the first time.

“I’m good. I can do it. I’m sorry I wasted people’s time.”

“What’s your name?” Will asked.

“Oliver.”

“How old are you, Oliver?”

“I’m twenty-three.”

Will nodded. Young but legal. Not to mention that Will had started doing porn when he was twenty-two. It would have been hypocritical of him to say anything.

“It’s ok. You didn’t waste anything. You’re nervous. It’s ok to be nervous. Is it your first time doing porn?”

“I did a couple of stuff at home with some friends but it’s my first time on a set, yes.”

“Ok. We can change the scene if you want. Do something you’re more comfortable doing.”

“No, no. I’m ok. I swear.”

Will nodded slowly, “Ok then. Will you be fine shooting that scene with me?”

The man swallowed, “That’d be an honor, Sir.”

Will chuckled, “Please, call me Will,” he turned toward Jerry again,

“Ok for you, Jer?”

Jerry pushed his hands in front of him “The stage is yours, Byers.”

Will nodded, “Ok. I have to call Ravi and shower. Can you give me thirty minutes?”

“Sure, boss!”

Will chuckled, “Thanks Jer,” he turned to Oliver who was still looking at him with eyes as big as saucers, “Take a break. Make yourself comfortable. Try to stretch a bit. We have toys in that room over there but don't overdo it. We don't want to tire your muscles yet!” he winked, “I'll be right back.”

“O-ok,” the young man stammered.

Will smiled and headed toward the changing rooms, producing his phone from his pocket to call his partner.

Ravi answered at the first ring.

“Babe?”

“Hey love, I'm running a bit late.”

“Is everything ok with Nat?”

“Yes, it's all good. I'm just helping Jerry on set.”

“Helping?”

“There was an issue with Francis - you know the Nazi guy-”

“- he's not a Nazi!” Ravi countered.

Will ignored him, “It didn't go well between him and a new guy. I fired him -”

“You did what?”

“- Jer needs a top. I'm taking the lead.”

There was a small pause. Ravi was probably thinking over what Will had just said.

"What's the scene?" he asked after a while, knowing Will wouldn't explain his actions any further.

"Mostly anal. But I'm thinking of mixing things up a bit with a blowjob or two. He's got nice lips, that would be a waste not to put them to good use!"

"Around your cock you mean?" Ravi joked.

"Where else?!" Will replied in the same tone.

"Is the guy hot?"

"Yes, he's really cute. Dark hair and blue eyes. And he's got a nice body too. A bit too lanky yet but he's still young so that's understandable."

"How young?"

"Twenty-three."

"Ouch. Be careful babe, you're gonna be called a pedophile!"

"Shut up, Ravi,"

Will arrived in the bathing zone and pushed the door to a private locker room open, "Please, don't say anything to Mike. He's gonna freak out I'll infect his kids with imaginary diseases. And I don't fancy having him look at me like I'm the grossest thing in the world for the remainder of his vacation."

"Don't worry, I won't. I'm not stupid."

He was back on set thirty minutes later, clad into a white silk robe, fully naked underneath. His soon to be screen partner was still there, covered in a robe too. He was looking at Will with huge, shiny eyes. He had every reason to. Will's charisma and reputation could be

very intimidating, he knew that.

Jerry clapped his hands enthusiastically, "The Star has arrived! Let's roll!"

Will chuckled, "Jer, would you mind if we add some stuff?"

"What do you have in mind?"

He turned his attention on the young man.

"Would you be comfortable doing more?"

"Yes, I guess."

"Is oral ok?"

His eyes widened at that, "Yes..." he whispered.

"And kissing with the tongue too?"

"Yes."

"Ok. So here's what I propose," he began to explain in a serious, professional voice devoid of emotion, "We'll do four different shots using a mix of different angles each. A make out scene on that couch to get riled up. Something sexy with open mouths and neck kissing. Then, we'll record a blowjob still on the couch and finally we'll shoot the anal scene. I'll penetrate you with a maximum of three fingers and my cock. Nothing more. You have my word. We'll do a few shots on that couch, you on your back, then on your knees and finally we'll shoot the same stuff over there, with your hands pressed over the walls, bent over, me behind you, my hands on your hips. You seem to have a good arch. So we'll use that. Ok for you?"

"Yes... It's more than ok!" he replied, lost in complete admiration.

"Good," he turned to Jerry, "Jer?"

The man shook his head, "It's all good. I trust your judgement Byers. As always."

Will nodded, "Perfect."

To most people's ears, the exchange would have been crude, obscene and dirty. But there wasn't a single tone of lewdness in Will's voice. He was like a doctor explaining a surgery. Factual.

"Is there anything you don't like or want at all?" he asked the younger man.

Oliver bit his lip, "I'm not too comfortable with humiliation and very rough stuff," he said, blushing with embarrassment. He felt awkward saying that on a porn set.

Will shook his head, "No problem. We'll keep it sweet!" he bit the inside of his cheek and guided him to the couch. Around them, the staff began to move the cameras and arrange the lights, preparing for rolling.

"You ready?" he asked.

Oliver nodded, his cheeks all flushed.

Will removed the robe and let it slide off his shoulders, baring his body to all. Oliver trailed his eyes up and down and gasped, his lips shining with saliva.

"You're so beautiful," he whispered, looking completely dazed.

Will chuckled, "Thanks."

Behind them, Jerry agreed against his camera, "You're damn right! Look at that ass! You're fucking delicious Byers!"

Will shook his head with a small smile.

He noticed a small crowd had formed around them. Curious people who wanted to see Will in action. It's been a long time since he performed after all.

"Will you be comfortable with the audience?" he asked Oliver.

Oliver nodded.

Will closed the distance between them, "Remember to focus on me," he said in a more private tone, "On my hands, my lips and my voice. I'll tell you when to move, moan, arch your back or switch position. Jerry will help too. Focus on what you're feeling and let us do the rest. If something goes wrong, if you feel uncomfortable during a shot, if you don't want to do something or if I hurt you, tell me right away and I'll stop. Alright? It's important to feel safe."

Oliver nodded.

Will smiled and pressed his hand on the soft looking cheek, his thumb brushing his partner's mouth, "You've got such beautiful lips," he whispered, staring at them, "I can't wait to have them wrapped around my cock."

The young man gasped at those words.

"You ready?" Will asked, earning another nod, "Alright, let's do this."

He smiled and bent to capture his lips in a hot, searing kiss, efficiently stealing the other man's breath away.

Nate was having a horrible day. He was awfully, *awfully*, disappointed. First, Will had bailed on him, breaking his promise for the first time ever. Then he had to deal with his father's outburst regarding the ride that didn't happen. And now, it was raining and he was forced to stay inside. He was bored and there was nothing to do.

He sighed, watching his sisters bicker about TV programs. Shelley wanted to watch Twilight but Julie kept saying it was lame, flipping the channel back to Nickelodeon and the girls were getting loud in their fight. He rolled his eyes and decided he'd had enough.

He returned to his room and threw himself on his bed with a groan. He was so bored! Spread on his stomach, he grabbed his phone and checked his messages and Facebook wall. No new text, no new post. He sighed again, feeling lonely. He hesitated and began to type out on his phone a message for Jessy.

Hey man, hope you're doing ok. Things could be better here.

Will was supposed to take me for a jet ski ride but he cleared off. I think he went to work without telling us. I'm mad and super bored. Without him, there's nothing to do...

4.48pm, Nate

Jessy's answer popped up merely a minute later.

Still obsessed with your old man, I see! How's the house? Did you find any sex toy or porn stuff? Here it's been raining for three days. I'm fucking bored too. My mom's driving me crazy. She's back on drinking and it's been kind of rough.

4.49pm, Jessy

Nate pouted when he read his friend's answer. Jessy lived alone with his mother. She suffered from chronic depression and treated herself with pills and alcohol. It was hard on Jessy. When his mother was in crisis, she could say really nasty things to him that she forgot the next day. Nate had spent countless nights talking to Jessy on the phone as his friend fought a panic attack on his own, trying to suppress the overflow of emotions caused by his mother.

Fuck, man. That's harsh. If your mom is too much of a bore, come home. My dad leaves a key to the garage under the rug. It's not much but at least you'd have some quiet. The house is awesome! It's huge! They have a pool and a private beach. And I have my own bathroom! Can you believe that? I don't have to share with my parents or my sisters. It's so great! But things are better when Will is here. We spent the whole afternoon playing in the pool yesterday. He touched me at least ten times! And he's not old!

4.51pm, Nate

He waited a few minutes on his bed until the answer beeped in his hand.

Yuck. How many boners did you pop in that pool? And he's old. He's the age of your folks! That's fucking old! What about the porn stuff? Thanks for the tip with the key. I'll think about it if it

gets too much. She has Alfonso coming over tonight. He's gonna screw her and maybe she'll be less of a hysterical bitch after that. Fuck, my mom's such a slut!

4.54pm, Jessy

His mouth contorted in a grimace as he read and he typed a quick response.

Ew! I didn't need to know about your mom and Alfonso! Now I'm gonna have nightmares! Thanks! I managed to keep my cock away from him. I'm not stupid! And I didn't find anything unfortunately. Will had had the whole house bleached and children-proofed before we arrived.

4.55 pm, Nate

A moment passed. After a full ten minutes, he realized Jessy wasn't going to answer anytime soon and he sighed, scrolling down his phone again. The rain was pitter-pattering against the window. He rolled on his back and let his arms fall flat on the mattress in the shape of a cross, staring at the wood beams on the ceiling with a pout. What was Will doing? Was he working? Was he shooting? Was he doing porn right now? Was he... was he naked? His body throbbed at the thought. He closed his eyes and inhaled through his nose, his mind conveying images of Will in the pool a few hours earlier. How hot he looked then, swimming in those briefs. He remembered the powerful muscles of his thighs moving underwater, his firm buttocks, his strong back... His wet hair and body when he emerged from the water...

His teeth sunk in his bottom lip as his waist jumped a bit forward.

It didn't take long for his body to be riled up, his hips bucking up and down on the mattress. He was young and bored. There wasn't much else to do. He grimaced, focusing on his thoughts as his hand began to trail down.

The first few strokes calmed him a bit but it wasn't enough. He needed more. He remembered the pool bar, how Will had fucked that guy on that bar and he suppressed a moan. That's what he wanted.

He wanted to feel Will like that. Another memory collided with his fantasy. In a recent video, Will had said he was able to sustain erections for long hours. That he took pills for that. How long would he last with Nate? How much Nate would be able to take?

His breath hitched in his throat. His brow furrowed into a scowl of concentration. It wasn't enough. He needed more. He needed to feel... in the pit of his belly... He rose on his elbows and checked the room was locked before burying himself under the sheets of his bed, hiding his sin from view. It wasn't the first time he touched himself deeper. He had done it a few times before, especially after watching Will's video about prostate and anal stuff. He was curious and Will explained things well. Usually, it did the trick. Two fingers, the other hand on his cock and he came quickly enough. Not this time. His own touch was too shallow and left him even more frustrated. He groaned and opened his eyes to scan the room for something that could help relieve the tension. Something a bit bigger than his two scrawny fingers. Something that could go deeper. Like Will's cock would.

He jumped off the bed and began to rummage through the cupboards, his brain buzzing with the rush of hormones. He was in the house of two porn stars! Surely, it'd find something! Some plug or any other kind of sex toy. Nate knew movies had been shot in that house. Many of them. So there had to be something!

But there wasn't anything.

That's what he concluded after a fruitless search party of ten minutes. Absolutely nothing. Except for his clothes, the cupboards were empty. The room was more pristine than a museum. He sighed in frustration, his body still throbbing with the need to be satisfied. Blinking back to his bed, he remembered his own things and the brush he'd brought along. The brush was in his toiletry bag. This was probably the most phallic thing around. He went to fetch the brush from the bag and observed it for a second, his body painfully throbbing with the need to be satisfied. The plastic handle was large and carved with several dents that made it easier to hold. It wasn't smooth but it would do. He didn't exactly have a choice anyway. He was so horny, anything was good to take.

With his head buzzing, he slipped back into bed and resumed where

he'd stopped. He suddenly remembered Will's video and how Will had insisted over and over on the use of lube in his explanation. There wasn't any available so precum and spit would have to do. Will often used spit in his videos anyway, so it had to be somehow effective. The intrusion of the brush burned but it worked and slipped through, Nate being too gone to linger on pain. His mind was full of Will. Will's body. Will's smile. Will's hands on his shoulders. Will's cock in him. In his ass. In his mouth. Will absolutely everywhere. Making Will so fucking proud.

He came in a strangled cry, his body shaking and collapsing blissfully. After taking a deep breath, he removed the brush from inside of him and opened his eyes, still dazed from the intensity of his orgasm. It was amazing! One of his best. He let his hands fall to his sides on the mattress, his lungs still burning from the need to breathe. It took a moment for his heart to calm down and return to a normal rate but Nate smiled, happy.

He felt better. A lot better.

But his relief was short-lived. He sniffled and pulled the brush from beneath the sheets only to freeze in shock. The plastic handle was red. His eyes widened in alarm and he pushed on his hand to sit, grimacing at the pain in his backside.

What the Hell?

He pulled the sheets from his body and checked between his legs. There was a fresh stain of blood there too. The vision made him feel faint. What the Hell? Blood was also drying on the hand he had used to hold the handle.

"Fuck," he muttered, jumping off the bed in haste, "Fuck, fuck, fuck!"

What had he done?

He was screwed. Completely screwed! Not to mention that his ass was beginning to burn really bad. What a complete idiot! What a pathetic noob! With trembling hands, he ran to the bathroom directly into the shower to rinse himself off. The water running down his legs was red. Tears fell on his cheeks. He was scared. What would his

parents say? Would they attend his funeral or would they disown him? He could only imagine his mother's face, clad in a black veil, flaring her nostrils at the announcement of the priest that he bled out to death after ripping his ass with a hairbrush!

What a stupid way to die!

He stayed under the water for a good five minutes, until the water ran clear and wrapped a towel around himself to sit at the edge of the shower. What was he going to do? He didn't want to go to a doctor and show his buttocks to a complete stranger! No way!

Checking the towel again, he saw that he was still bleeding.

He needed help. Urgently.

Still cloaked in his towel, he walked to the window. His parents were reading in the pavilion away from the house. His sisters were probably still downstairs. Will was away. Maybe he could talk to Ravi... Ravi was his only shot. The man was neutral and he did porn which helped Nate feel like he was the safe person to speak to. He put on the bathrobe hanging on the wall and tiptoed out of his room. The sound of TV could be heard from the lounge room where he left his sisters.

He made his way down the stairs as quietly as he could, ignoring the burn in his backside at each step he took. He passed close to the lounge room making sure Shelley wouldn't spot his presence and headed toward the kitchen where he thought he heard a noise.

He found Ravi, busy cutting bananas and pomegranates.

"Hey kiddo!" Ravi exclaimed when he saw him enter, "Going for a swim? It's still raining outside so you should probably wait."

Nate shook his head, securing the robe around himself, hoping no blood stain was forming on the white fabric behind him.

"I'm not going for a swim... Do you have a minute? I think I need your help."

"Sure. Is something wrong?"

“Can you come over?”

Ravi frowned, “Of course. Where?”

Nate opened his eyes wide and bit his lip, “Uhm, upstairs.”

“Ok...” Ravi answered slowly, “Is everything alright?”

Nate didn’t answer and led Ravi up the stairs to his room in silence. Ravi followed without a word. When they arrived in front of Nate’s bedroom door, the boy stopped and faced Ravi again.

“Please, promise me you won’t freak out or be mad?”

Ravi’s frown deepened, “Are you ok, Nate? Did you break something in there? Do you want me to call your mum?”

“No! Please don’t. Just, promise.”

Ravi kept staring at the boy for a long minute before nodding slowly, “Ok.”

Nate sighed and moved to open the door, wincing at the pain when his legs touched again. At first Ravi didn’t see anything and his face expressed nothing but confusion. But when he spotted the dark blood stain on the bed, his eyes widened dramatically and he hurried to check the sheet, appalled.

“My God, Nate! What happened?”

Nate nibbled his bottom lip nervously and looked down at his feet, “You promise not to laugh?”

“Laugh? You think I want to laugh? What happened?”

“I did something stupid,” Nate confessed sheepishly.

“What?”

The boy licked his mouth, “I was... busy... doing... stuff. And I guess I went too hard...” He wasn’t looking at Ravi, keeping his eyes on the ground before him.

It took a moment for the man to decipher the adolescent's riddle but when he did, he raised his brow in shocked acknowledgement, "Oh! You mean, you were..." he gestured with his hand awkwardly.

Nate nodded, blushing.

"Oh."

"Yeah."

Ravi's lips had parted and he was running a hand in his back nervously, "I see..." he swallowed, "So you mean that the blood came out of your..." he swallowed again, "penis?"

Nate flared his nostrils in embarrassment and shook his head slowly, going red from head to toe.

It took another moment for Ravi for the dots to connect.

"Oh."

Silence ensued. Nate still couldn't dare look at him. It was just too awkward.

"With what did you...?" Ravi began, not finishing the sentence to avoid pronouncing the words.

Nate didn't answer, going to search the brush instead. When Ravi saw it, he sent the boy a pointed look.

"Really, Nate? You used... that?"

Nate shrugged, "I didn't have anything else..."

Ravi pinched the bridge of his nose, squinting his eyes shut, "Ok. So if I sum up correctly, you used that horrible torture device to get off and now you're bleeding from the bumbum? Is that right?"

Nate looked at his feet in a growing burst of shame, "Yes."

"I don't suppose you had any lube?"

"No."

“Great.”

“Am I going to die?” Nate asked, looking up at the man with shiny eyes.

The question took Ravi off guard and the man stared at Nate dumbfounded, “Die?”

“Yes?”

“No! No, Nate, you’re not gonna die!” he stopped to observe the boy, “You probably scrubbed some skin off. It’s nothing, don’t worry! Are you still bleeding?”

“A bit,” Nate mumbled with a small pout, “I rinsed myself but it didn’t help...”

“Ok,” Ravi said before taking a deep breath, “So, what you’re gonna do is take another shower to rinse off again. You can use water and soap. No shower gel.”

“I use Aleppo soap.”

“That’s good. Use that. Rinse until the water is clear again. Don’t rub too hard and don’t go too deep. Don’t worry, kid you’ll be fine. I know it can get pretty scary but it’s just because that region is full of nerves. So it bleeds a lot very easily. You’re gonna be ok. It’s just gonna sting a couple of days and then you’ll be fine. I promise. Go clean up.”

Nate nodded dejectedly and dragged his feet to the bathroom.

He came out of the room twenty minutes later. His butt was stinging like crazy but it wasn’t bleeding anymore. Ravi was still in the room, changing the sheets. The mattress was also strained.

Nate cringed, “Sorry about that,” he whispered, feeling very embarrassed.

Ravi dismissed him with a shake of his head, “It’s ok, Nate. Don’t worry about it. Things like that happen.”

“Has it ever happened to you or Will?” he asked, cocking his head to the side.

Ravi chuckled, “We’re gay men. And we do porno. So yes, it’s already happened!”

“That sucks...”

“Welcome to the joys of anal sex, my dear!”

Nate scrunched his nose, “I thought this was supposed to be fun...”

“Oh it is but you gotta be careful. There’s some stuff you should know before practicing. To know how to do it safely. Lube. Smooth round objects. Patience. Have you watched Will’s video about anal sex? You should watch it. He says very important things in it.”

“I have.”

“And you didn’t listen...”

“I was kind of in a rush...” he trailed off, feeling heat gather in his cheeks.

Ravi smirked, “I see... Didn’t want to lose the image!” he joked.

Nate blushed. Ravi winked at him.

A few minutes passed as Ravi finished cleaning the bed. Nate observed him quietly. He really liked Ravi. He was a nice man. Nate felt comfortable around him. Like, he could have told him anything without the fear of being judged.

“Ravi?”

“Aye?”

“How did you start doing porn?”

Ravi frowned, “A bit by chance I’d say. I started as a camera assistant and I ended up on pornsets. It was never something I actively wanted. It just happened. From there, I started acting, replacing

actors when they couldn't make it for the shooting. That's how I met Will. He was supposed to shoot with a guy who broke his leg in the stairs and I replaced him. Will was actually my first porn partner. Let's just say that the experience kind of encouraged me to continue," he smirked.

Nate blushed.

"You're not scared your parents will know?" he asked.

Ravi shrugged, "My parents come from a tiny village in the state of Punjab. They didn't have any running water or electricity. They arrived in Liverpool when my sister was two. It's been forty years but they still struggle to speak good English. They don't have any computer and actually got their very first color television set in 1995. Up until I told them, they didn't know what *gay* meant and my mum called in panic two weeks ago because the doctor said my father had erectile dysfunctions and she wanted to know if it was contagious and if my sister could catch it!" Ravi explained with a smile, "My mum's hilarious and both are very tolerant. They've accepted my homosexuality without a problem and they know Will is famous. They just don't know what he's famous for."

Nate chuckled, "None of your family members know?"

"My sisters. They're fine with it!"

He stepped away from the clean bed and went to fetch a small tube he had left on the console.

"Here," he said, handing the tube to Nate, "It's Calendula. Apply some on the wound twice a day for three days. It will help you heal."

Nate blushed, "Thanks Ravi."

Ravi winked at him, "No worries, kiddo. And please, don't use that brush again. Smooth objects, Nate. Smooth."

Nate nodded, "Promise."

Ravi observed him with a small smirk for a minute more. Their conversation was cut short when a voice rose from downstairs. It was

a man's voice but it wasn't Will or his father.

"Hello?" the voice called, "Is there anyone here? Will? Ravi?"

Ravi frowned, "I'll be right back," he told Nate before heading away from the room.

He trotted down the stairs. A blond man with deep green eyes and stubble was waiting on the threshold. Ravi smiled.

"Rick!" he greeted, "What are you doing here?"

"Hey, Rav!" Rick greeted back, "Sorry to bother you but I have a problem with my boat."

Ravi grimaced, "Will's away at the studio. I can text him though. What's the matter?"

"The rain broke the turbine. I just need to unstuck it."

"I see... I can call Will. He shouldn't be too long now, it's almost 6pm. Do you want a drink while I try to call?"

"Sure."

He led Rick to the pavilion where Mike and Jezebel were reading, enjoying the calm of the setting sun. When they saw Ravi approach with a stranger, they turned to look at them.

"This is Micheal and his wife Jezebel," Ravi introduced, "This is Ricardo, a friend. He lives on the coast nearby and got an issue with his boat."

Ricardo smiled, "Nice to meet you."

They shook hands. Jezebel pushed her sunglasses on her nose, her hair up in a bun.

"Hi," she said with a smile.

"I needed to borrow Will for some boat expertise but Ravi told me he

was out.”

“I’m calling him,” Ravi said, “Make yourself comfortable. What do you want to drink?”

“A beer is fine,” he said as he took a seat.

Ravi nodded, “Mike? Jez?”

“A beer for me too,” Mike answered.

“I’m ok with wine,” Jezebel completed.

Away from the pavilion, they noticed Nate who had just walked out the house. When the boy saw them, he froze, his eyes widened as if in shock and he ran back inside. The adults frowned.

"Who was that?" Ricardo asked with an amused smile.

"Our son, Nathaniel," Mike said, "Please, ignore him. He's a teenager... They're crazy at that age."

Jezebel sent a pointed look at her husband, "Mike..."

Ravi's frown lasted a bit longer. Why had Nate ran away like that? He had looked... spooked.

“I’ll be right back,” he whispered still looking where Nate had disappeared and followed suit.

No one spoke during the first three minutes. Jezebel was smiling awkwardly, glancing repeatedly at the intruder. Mike didn’t look any more at ease and truly didn’t know what to do with himself. To be honest, he hadn’t spent the best of days and was still mad at Will for abandoning him for the obscenity he called his job.

Against all odds, Jezebel was the first one to step forward and engage a conversation.

“So, Ricardo,” she said with a rather forced smile, “Ravi said you live around?”

Ricardo nodded, "Yes. I live on a boat actually."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"That's nice!"

"It is. But it does have its downsides!"

"For how long have you been living like that?"

"It's been six years. I used to live in the city. I got bored. I love the sea too much!"

"And how have you met Will and Ravi?"

"I work with Will."

His answer fell like a bomb. Jezebel's sweet mood immediately switched. Mike clenched his jaw. Of course. He should have known something was off with this man. This very attractive man...

"Oh," Jezebel stammered, "So you're a..." she didn't finish her sentence, her face growing red with embarrassment.

The man seemed to find her reaction amusing for he smiled and humored her, "Yes, m'am. I'm a..."

"Oh, I see..."

Ravi chose that moment to return with the tray of drinks. When he noticed the tension, he frowned.

"Is everything alright?"

"Yes, of course!" Jezebel answered, her voice wavering.

Mike couldn't blame her. He knew she was feeling trapped.

Ravi observed them, setting the drinks on the table slowly, "I had Will on the phone. He's on his way. He'll be there in twenty minutes."

“Oh good!” Ricardo said.

“Ricardo told us he worked with Will,” Jezebel said with her polite but very uncomfortable little smile, her voice going even more high-pitched.

Ravi blinked. Ricardo shrugged apologetically.

“Yes,” Ravi confirmed with a thick voice, “They work together.”

“But not with you?”

“No. Not with me.”

“Oh. Ok. That’s good. That’s good.”

Ravi bit his lip. He should have known things would be awkward when he introduced them. Especially since Rick was particularly comfortable doing what he did and had no trouble talking about it. He didn’t have Will’s restraints when it came to this family. Jezebel grabbed her glass of wine and hurried to take a sip, as if the content was going to save her and make things instantly okay. Mike looked terribly constricted, giving small forced smiles at the man.

Ravi raised his brow and drank from his beer. It was going to a long twenty minutes wait.

“Was Will shooting?” Rick asked naturally.

Ravi felt his two guests stiffen beside him. He shook his head. He had promised Will he wouldn’t say anything and he didn’t want to risk another upheaval.

“No. He was just handing a file to Nat that she forgot here.”

“It’s a bit long for just a folder drop...” Mike muttered under his breath.

“He’s been held by some boss work apparently,” Ravi justified in haste hoping they would drop the subject altogether and speak about the rain.

It was without counting on Ricardo who didn't feel Ravi's discomfort or simply didn't care.

"If he was at the Studio today, he must have ran into Jer," he said, "They were shooting with Pittsbhurger," he almost spat the name.

"Will fired him," Ravi answered without thinking and immediately regretted his words.

Ricardo's eyes widened, "Who? Jerry?"

"No! Francis!"

"Will fired Francis?!"

"Yes. Apparently he went too far this time and Will'd had enough."

Ricardo raised his brow, "It was bound to happen..."

"Who's Francis?" Jezebel asked with an overly sweet voice, joining the conversation.

Ravi opened his mouth to answer but Ricardo was faster.

"One of Jerry's tops," he explained, "A real Diva. One of the most unpleasant man I've had the displeasure to work with. Will has never liked him. He never liked the way he treated other actors. How rude and condescending he was... Bottoming for this guy was a real nightmare!"

"Doesn't sound like a very nice man," Jezebel conceded in her sweet voice.

"No indeed."

Jezebel nodded. Ravi knew she probably had no idea what *tops* or *bottoming* meant and her ignorance showed in the way she smiled, like a foreigner who didn't speak the language but pretended anyway out of politeness. Mike was another story. Mike knew. He'd been there. He didn't want to admit it anymore but he was like them. Part of their world. He spoke their language, shared their codes. And he deciphered every single one of Ricardo's words, wrinkling his nose in

disgust and Ravi couldn't wait to see Will.

Will returned a bit after seven.

He found Ricardo, Jezebel and Mike at the table on the terrace by the pool. Ravi had disappeared in the kitchen. Ricardo was staying for dinner. He couldn't go home without his boat anyway and no one but Will was handy enough to help. Ricardo rose from his chair to hug Will and the two men exchanged a quick greeting, Will taking a good notice of the glare Mike had cast in their direction.

Dinner went rather well. Way better than Will expected anyway.

Truth be told, when Ravi called to tell him - in a poorly hidden panicked tone - that Ricardo was there, fear gripped his heart. Mike and Jezebel already had issues with them both and they made an effort to be discreet about their life... Ricardo wasn't so... This could end up badly and he sort of expected to find the two men in a heated fight, Jezebel unconscious on a lounge chair, her hand over her forehead in good Victorian fashion.

It was quite the opposite.

Sure, the first hour had been difficult. Ricardo wasn't stupid. He knew their job was making his two ordinary friends terribly uncomfortable and the tension at the table was palpable, discussions shallow and hard to start.

But as time passed and cups filled up with wine, tongues began to untie and Mike and Jezebel slowly relaxed. Will wasn't really surprised. Ricardo was a friendly man. It was hard not to like him. He knew how to adapt to people and how to make them feel at ease. He was particularly appreciated by the girls who laughed at his jokes and showered him with questions on his life on a boat. It was nice. Nate was another story however. It was clear the kid was still mad at Will for his betrayal in the morning. Will wasn't proud of himself but it wasn't like he had purposefully broken his word. He had responsibilities he couldn't simply skim. But the teenager's behavior was odd. There was something off. He kept looking at Ricardo with a

flushed face, had not uttered a word all evening and kept moving his hips, changing position every ten minutes. Will frowned. Some signs were really recognizable. Especially when you worked in the sex industry. Was it possible that Nate had seen Ricardo in action? Ricardo didn't just shoot with him after all. If so, then it meant the boy was watching gay porn. He shook his head.

What was he thinking... He had no right wondering about the teen's intimacy. This was Nate's life.

Two courses, dessert and three bottles of wine later, night had long fallen. The kids had left the table and were playing somewhere inside the house, leaving the adults alone to talk. Ricardo checked his watch. It was past eleven.

"Damn. It's late. I don't think you'll be able to fix my boat, Willy?"

Will shook his head, "Sorry man. It's too dark and too dangerous. We can't see anything on the shore."

"Stay the night," Ravi proposed, "The house is big enough. We'll fix your boat in the morning."

Ricardo nodded with a sigh, "I know. My wife's gonna kill me."

The moment he pronounced those words, Jezebel - that wine made particularly chatty - turned to look at him with a frown.

"Your wife?" she said in a voice so high-pitched it sounded like the chirping of a bird - a tipsy bird, "You're married? To a woman?"

She looked completely confused. Will bit his lip. He'd been waiting for that moment.

Ricardo blinked at her, "Uhm, yes."

Her face broke into a scowl, "But you said you worked with Will? As in... doing what Will does... Or did I misunderstand?"

"No, no. I do work with Will. You got that right!"

"But does your wife know you're gay?"

Will pressed his lips into a line. Ravi bit down a smile.

"I'm not gay," Ricardo responded with a smile.

"You're not?"

Will and Ravi exchanged a look. Ricardo smiled gently. He was used to it.

"No, I'm straight."

She looked around the table, looking deeply distraught, "I'm sorry. I don't understand."

"Let it go, Jez," Mike muttered next to her.

Ravi took pity on her, "It's called gay for pay. It's when straight actors choose to do gay porn."

"But... Why would they do that? If they're not gay? Shouldn't they be with women instead?"

Mike rolled his eyes, "Oh come on, Jez!"

"What?" she snapped at him, "You always say I never ask any questions and that I'm a prude! I'm making an effort to understand and you're being mean to me!"

Will bit his lip. Ravi chuckled. It was rare to see her like this. It was a good change. She was kind of cute, all flushed and pouting.

Ricardo stepped to answer, "I don't know about the other actors but I chose the gay industry because the mainstream scene is awfully sexist. I happen to love and respect women. Unfortunately many directors and producers of the heterosexual industry don't and ask actors to treat their fellow actresses badly. That's not my thing. So I chose to join the gay industry. Sure you have jerks in the gay scene too but not in the company I work."

"But if you're not gay, don't you mind being with men?"

He shrugged, "It's just a job. And it's easier."

“Easier?”

Mike rolled his eyes. He was about to sneer again but Will bent forward before he could say something nasty.

"Stop it," he whispered, "She's not doing anything wrong. Let her ask her questions."

“She’s embarrassing everyone!” he snarled.

“She’s only embarrassing you! Ricardo’s perfectly fine talking to her! Leave your wife alone!”

Mike flared his nostrils and buried his head in his shoulders. Ricardo picked a piece of bread before answering Jezebel's question.

“I’m a bottom,” he explained, “So it’s a loss less physically demanding.”

Jezebel blinked, “What’s a bottom?” she asked in a timid smile as if she was afraid to make a fool of herself.

“I’m the one who takes it,” he winked with a smile.

Jezebel’s face turned beet red, “Oh. I see...”

Mike grimaced. He was so ill at ease, it was ridiculous. As if the topics of conversation made him ashamed of being judged himself. Will rolled his eyes at this. What a child he could be!

Ricardo continued, “I don't have to do much. Contrary to Will who sometimes needs to keep an erection for seven hours.”

Will strangled himself. He would have rather stayed out of the conversation than attract unwanted attraction. Jezebel turned to look at him slowly, staring at him with huge eyes as if Will were a different species.

“You can keep erections for seven hours?”

Will blushed, “I take pills for that, Jez. I don’t do it on my own...”

Jezebel observed him for what seemed to be the longest minute before refocusing her attention on her very distraught husband who looked like he wanted to be anywhere but at this table with them.

“Maybe you should take those pills too!” she said.

Ravi swallowed his laugh. Will’s eyes widened. Ricardo bit his lip. Mike grabbed his wife’s glass with a scowl.

“Ok, that’s enough with the wine.”

Ricardo rolled his eyes, “She’s not your kid, is she?”

Mike glared at the man with such animosity Will almost jumped to intervene. He didn’t and only put his hand on the flushed man’s arm to calm him. Mike’s breath immediately slowed and he looked at Will with his parted lips. Will kept their eyes locked, telepathically soothing him as he always did when Mike was upset. Jezebel ignored them and kept her fingers curled around her glass, sipping from it, actively listening to Ricardo as if she was drinking his words. Will blinked. Her face was flushed and she kept playing with her hair, bending forward to get a bit closer to him. He gulped, understanding at least what’s been nagging at him since the beginning of the meal.

She was flirting with his friend, openly flirting and Mike was jealous.

Ricardo made a joke and Jezebel burst in laughter, batting her eyelashes, sending an impressive amount of pheromone his way. Will smirked. Yes, she was totally enamored. Was it because he was straight in spite of doing porn? Was she fascinated? He frowned, observing them.

He felt like he’d set the fox to watch the geese.

After everyone had returned inside the house and Ravi gone to make Ricardo’s bed in one of their guestrooms, Mike joined Will under the pavilion. The man was looking at the shades on the pool caused by the lights, smoking what looked to be a joint of Marijuana.

“I thought you didn’t touch drugs,” Mike jabbed.

Will raised his brow, "That's not drugs. That's medicinal."

He offered the joint to Mike who took it with a small smile, "Sure, sure..."

They remained silent for a few minutes, enjoying their smoke and the calm of the night. The shades on the pool were soothing to watch. It really was a beautiful house.

"Why didn't you tell me anything about the aneurysm?" Will asked. He'd been waiting all day to know.

Mike shrugged, "You were busy touring. I didn't want to alarm you for nothing."

Will turned to look at him with wide eyes, "For nothing? You got almost blind!"

Mike kept his eyes in front of him, "It was just a few days and only one eye. I'm fine."

"I can't believe you didn't tell me anything... Am I a stranger to you?" Will spat.

Mike sighed, "Please, Will. Don't start..."

Will shook his head. Awkward silence settle for a few minutes.

"I need to exercise more..." Mike said.

"My offer for joining my runs still stand."

They locked eyes.

"I'll see..." Mike stammered, looking away.

"As you wish. But please, next time something like that happens, let me know. Even if I'm at the other part of the country."

Mike nodded, "Ok."

"Promise!"

"Fine, I promise!" Mike said with an exasperated sigh.

"Thanks," Will whispered softly, looking at Mike, "I don't want anything bad to happen to you. I couldn't get over it..."

Mike rolled his eyes, "Oh come on, no need to be so dramatic! I'll let you know. I promise."

He turned to look at Will and the other man smirked.

Silence returned again. Mike accepted the joint from Will.

"I'm sorry," he suddenly said, "I was a jerk during dinner. Ricardo is a nice guy."

Will raised his brow, "You realize your wife was flirting with him, right?"

"She was drunk. She likes blonds. And she's fucking horny."

"You don't say..."

"We haven't had sex in eight months. She's kind of frustrated."

Will sighed, "Should I even bother asking why?"

Mike pulled on the joint, resting his arms on the balustrade, "She doesn't want to do anal anymore," he said, "She never liked it and always forced herself for me. She no longer wants to and since that's the only thing that makes me hard, we stopped having sex."

Will poked his tongue against his top lip, looking at his friend with contempt.

"You know what I think of repressed gay men who force their sexuality on their wives."

Mike dismissed, "Many straight couples do it. It's nothing special."

Will chuckled, "Not that many no. I work in the sex industry. I'm telling you, very few women actually do it. No matter what people say. And even less actually enjoy it. Most of the time, it's all about

pressure. Your wife is not a man. She doesn't have a prostate. Don't pretend like she does and feels the same as you."

"I know..."

"You know, if pussy disgusts you that much, you shouldn't have gotten married to a woman!"

Mike munched on his tongue, "That's what I tell myself everyday..."

Will shook his head, taking the joint from Mike's hands.

"That poor woman," he said, "Let her go. For real, Mike. Let her go. You're miserable together anyway."

Mike chuckled, "Does that show so much?"

Will didn't answer. He didn't need to.

Silence returned. They exchanged the joint for a couple of minutes until Mike spoke again, exalting the sweet smelling smoke.

"I'm not sexist," he said, "I got her a strap on. She never wanted to try it."

Will chuckled, coughing on the smoke.

"What?"

"Nothing! I'm just picturing your tiny wife with a huge plastic cock around her waist! It's hilariously cute!"

"Laugh as you want... She found that offensive. Men who get penetrated are a disgrace to her. They're not men."

Will observed him for a little while.

"She comes from a traditional catholic Polish family. What did you expect? Besides, she's been cooing at Rick all evening... So it doesn't exactly validate your theory..."

Mike shrugged, "She was drunk. Wait until tomorrow when she doesn't know what to do with herself..."

They went quiet again. The joint was finished and they had nothing to exchange anymore. Nothing solid to ground their conversation.

“You must think I’m despicable,” Mike whispered.

Will didn’t answer right away. He spent a good minute observing him from the side.

“I just think you’re unhappy, that’s all. And frustrated.”

Mike chuckled, “You say that because you want us to get back together!” he joked but there was a small glimmer of hope in his eyes and the way he smiled.

Will laughed before growing serious, “No,” he said and Mike felt his heart sink to the bottom of his stomach, “It didn’t work between us. It’s not gonna work any better now. I love you. I will always love you. But that’s not enough. Love doesn’t make relationships work. It’d be too easy if only love mattered. Our story ended because we were not compatible. We’re still not compatible now. I won’t quit my job and change who I am to please you. I didn’t do it then. I’m not doing it now. And you’re never going to accept it...”

Tears formed in Mike’s eyes.

“I can try.”

Will smiled sadly and shook his head, “No. I’m not doing this again. I love Ravi. I love my life. I’m not wasting any of it again. The mistake you made was not leaving me. The mistake you made was marrying a woman and feeding yourself lies you could live that way. You’re gay. You came out when you were fifteen. You were out and proud for almost ten years and all of a sudden, you turned your back to yourself. I know you, Micheal. You’re not the heterosexual man you want everybody to believe and you’re not fooling anyone.”

“Maybe I’m bisexual...” Mike shrugged.

“Are you bisexual?”

Mike chuckled, “No.”

Will looked away.

“What should I do then?” Mike continued.

“I don’t know. I don’t have the answer. It’s your life.”

There was a new moment of silence. Mike swallowed, looking at his joined hands hanging down from the fence.

“Are you happy?” he asked.

Will took a deep breath and nodded, “Yes. It’s not perfect. But I am. I have a great partner. I love my job. I’m successful in my career. I still have you in my life even if it’s different...”

“Are you still mad at me for leaving you?”

“I’m mad at you for the lie.”

Mike closed his eyes at the pain brought by those words.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered.

“It’s been fifteen years,” Will responded, “I’m over it.” He was not but there was no need to insist on that.

Mike nodded, "I'm going to bed. I'm exhausted."

Will smiled at him, "Good night."

Mike smiled back with the same glimmer of sadness in the depth of his eyes, "Good night."

They kept their eyes locked for a second until Mike looked away.

He returned to the room he shared with his wife. She was already asleep. He observed her before going to lock himself in the bathroom, spending some time to his sins, watching erotic photos of Will as he shamefully relieved himself.

Notes for the Chapter:

Let me know what you thought :)

5. The Boyfriend Privilege

Summary for the Chapter:

"Because they were seeing the same things, looking the same way, trying different approaches. Mike was distant, uncomfortable. Nate was eager and straightforward. And for the moment, it seemed that Nate was winning."

Ravi Kunar considered himself a lucky man.

He had a good life. He had the career, the money, the house and most importantly, the man. And not any man. Even now, ten years into the relationship, Ravi still had trouble realizing he was Will Byers's boyfriend. When Ravi met him, Will was the leading gay actor in the pornographic scene and the main top of most gay porn VHS available in special stores. He was known but he wasn't the icon he later became.

Now, Will was much more than a porn actor. He was an activist, a filmmaker, a producer, a company owner, a model, a visionary, an artist and more recently, an Award winner. He was also a very loving man, passionate about everything he did, ambitious, caring and loyal to a fault. Ravi was proud to be called his partner and everyday, he hoped to be worthy of the title so many people envied, some from a distance, others more aggressively.

Ravi had known Will before he met him in person. The first time he saw him, it was on his CRT monitor in the small room he rented in London. Although he knew of his attraction for men already, Will's glorious appearance amidst the poor TV reception confirmed his sexual preferences for good. He was twenty-five then and began a Will Byers' infatuation phase that never got to fade.

Will was the sexual fantasy of many. He was a gorgeous man, highly ranked several times in all sorts of beauty contests in magazines. In 2009, he even gained the title of the sexiest man alive in the gay press, a title he had yet to loose.

Will Byers was one of a kind.

Ravi knew this before he met him for real and he knew this even more after they started dating.

To be fair, he never thought he would go this far with his Celebrity crush. Seeing Will in person, *shooting a scene* with him was already more than he'd wagered. But going on a *date* with him? This was insane! In all honesty, when Will asked him out a week after they had met, Ravi was sure it was just to have sex. Why would a guy with Will's sulfurous reputation call him otherwise? And yet, there was no sex, not even a kiss. Will was a perfect gentleman. Poised and elegant in his black suit, polite and educated, composed and a bit shy. They had dinner in a nice restaurant, talked all evening and when Will walked him home, he bid him goodnight on the threshold, kissed his hand and left. That night, Ravi didn't know if he'd spent the evening with a self-restrained depraved or a Prince Charming.

Over the years, he realized that Will Byers was a bit of both.

He clicked on the email Jerry had just sent. It was the contract of Will's latest video with a link toward the preview for validation before it was officially published with Will's name. The footage began with a kiss. The hottest kiss Ravi had seen in a while. Then it switched to sex. Perfectly choreographed sex. He bit his lip. Will looked *gorgeous*. His fingers twitched and he reached toward the screen to touch the shape of his stunning body, feeling the usual mix of arousal and chest ache as his eyes fell on the other guy beneath him.

"Someone's being naughty!"

He turned on his seat to see Will staring at him from their bed, his head supported by his hand. The lower half of his body was covered by the sheet, the upper part bare from clothes. Ravi swallowed. Will's hair was still tousled from sleep. In moments like this, he didn't look just hot. He was a person, vulnerable and human. And Ravi was one of the very few allowed to see him this way. It was his own personal privilege. The *boyfriend* privilege.

"I confess, I've been caught red-handed," he admitted in a smile.

Will raised his brow, "I'm right here, you know. If you want a taste of the real thing..."

He laid back flat on the mattress and let the sheet slip from his body, revealing a neatly trimmed crotch and a half-erected penis resting between the curls. Ravi's heart missed a beat. Will sent him his most inviting stare, crossing his arms beneath his head.

Ravi rose from the chair and jumped on the bed, crawling above Will playfully.

"You're smutty, you know that," he whispered, covering Will's body with his and pressing their lips together in a kiss.

"And I'm proud of it," Will purred in a husky voice.

They kissed for a long minute. Will was always lazy in the morning, more feline than sexual and Ravi kissed his lips, cheeks and neck, making the other man chuckle against him. He was still warm and damp from sleep. Ravi loved those moments, when Will was being so candid, so authentic, away from the spotlights and staged performances.

His lips trailed down to Will's chest that he kissed, then to his ribcage and abs.

Will quivered beneath him, "We'll have to cut it short," he whispered, short of breath.

"And why is that?" Ravi asked, not looking away from the man's tone stomach.

"I'm meeting Nate on the beach. I'm taking him for a ride around the island. I was already supposed to do that yesterday and Nat happened. I won't bail on him a second time."

Ravi blinked, disturbed in his enthusiasm. Ah yes, Nate. *Of course* .

"You're a tease, you know that," Ravi admonished, biting the man's nipple.

Will arched against him, "Eh, I'm not the one watching porn so soon

in the morning!”

“In my defense, I was only checking my boyfriend’s work!” he licked at Will’s throat.

He loved his smell, even in the morning.

“And? What do you think?”

“So far, I’m impressed. That kiss is *hot*,” he whispered in Will’s ear.

Will smirked, “Yeah, I’m satisfied with that part.”

“How many takes?”

“Only this one. The guy was a natural. We didn’t have to redo much of the scenes. Some of them for the angles but for the most part it went smoothly.”

Ravi nodded. He kissed Will again, hungry for him but Will pushed him away gently.

“I have to get ready. Because if we start, I’ll never be at the beach on time.”

“You could do that this afternoon?” Ravi proposed, his lips still stuck to Will’s skin.

“No, the creek is gorgeous in the morning. I don’t want Nate to miss that.”

“You’re taking him to the creek?” Ravi asked, pausing, his chin resting on Will’s abdomen.

Will nodded, “I want to show him the colors. I’m sure he’ll love it.”

Ravi briefly closed his eyes. Nate would love more than the colors, he was sure. Not that he could say that to Will. Will was a clever man but when it came to Nate’s ugly crush on him, he was as stupid as stupid went. So much naivety was baffling, really. Especially from someone who worked in the sex industry and exchanged with teenagers on a weekly basis via a YouTube channel. It was so

unbelievable that Ravi was almost certain at times Will knew the truth but pretended otherwise.

“I’ll make it up to you tonight, I promise,” Will swore against Ravi’s lips.

He hopped off the bed and disappeared into the bathroom.

Ravi nodded although Will couldn’t see him. For a moment, he wanted to speak, he wanted to tell Will all the things Will didn’t want to see. He wanted to warn him about the inevitability he was slowly trapping himself into. But there was the sound of the water flowing in the shower and he knew Will couldn’t have heard him.

To Mike, this jetski ride was a terrible idea. He didn’t trust those machines one bit and knew how much of a Daredevil Will could be. But what could he do? Nate was overexcited and wouldn’t be talked out of it. Jezebel hadn’t reacted. She was too busy sleeping her hungover off. To be fair, Mike didn’t really need to be there either. Nate was almost sixteen, he could wait for Will on the beach alone. He glanced at the three jets by the shore and fidgeted nervously.

Will arrived a bit after nine in the morning, casual and perfectly relaxed as always, trotting down the sandy path in swimming shorts, biting into an apple as he walked. It could have been really fine, had Will not been shirtless. From the corner of his eye, he saw Nate’s eyes widen, his lips parting slightly, appreciative of the show.

“Hey kiddo,” he greeted with a grin before turning to Mike, “Hey, dad!”

Nate beamed at him. If he’d had a tail, it would have been wiggling like a happy puppy.

“Ready to go?” Will asked.

Nate nodded so hard Mike feared his head would detach from his neck.

Will chuckled, bit into his apple and focused his attention on Mike who was glaring at them.

“Come on, daddy. Stop sulking!” he mocked, his mouth full.

“I’m not sulking!” Mike retorted, “I just don’t like the idea of Nate on one of those machines, that’s all. They *are* dangerous.”

Will rolled his eyes and walked to the shore, grabbing the handle of one of the jets. He bent forth and produced a yellow life-jacket that he handed to the boy.

“Put this on,” he said, “We’ll take that one.”

“We’re riding together?” Nate asked and he could barely hide the excitement from his voice.

By his side, Mike was seeing red, his eyes squinting at Will’s perfectly outlined bare chest - the kind of chest kept hidden from innocent eyes for fear of setting them ablaze too soon. As ridiculous as it sounded, he liked the idea of Nate being close to a half-naked Will even less that he did the whole ride in itself. And just for that reason, he was almost tempted to propose his company to Will in replacement of his son’s. Even if it meant a moment of pain on those Hellish machines!

Will chuckled, oblivious to Mike’s torment.

“You thought I was going to let you drive?! Come on, Nate, I’m not irresponsible!” he turned to wink at Mike again, “See, I’m keeping your progeny safe!”

Mike rolled his eyes, “Will...”

“Come on, Micheal, loosen up!”

“I’m not -”

“You know you can trust me with your kid, right?!”

The question was genuine. Will was looking at Mike with an open expression, the very image of innocence, and Mike’s heart missed a

beat, his chest constricted with a pang of pain. His first reaction was to agree. The question was self-answered. Of course, he did. He had trusted Will with his kids since they were born. But then, his eyes returned to the man's torso and his heart began to beat harder. Nothing about Will was ever innocent. He was too visible, too exposed, too sexual. From the corner of his eye, he saw Nate watch him with that same half-concealed hunger and for a second, Mike didn't know anymore.

The doubt subsisted briefly before he blinked back to himself and nodded.

"Yes, I know that."

"So? What's the problem? I won't drive like crazy, I swear."

"I know, I know."

Will turned toward Nate again to help him secure the life-jacket around his waist. When he was sure it was solid enough, he waded into the water towards the jet and climbed with ease on the front part of the seat.

"Hop on, kiddo!" he cheered, letting the engine roar.

Mike watched Nate settle behind Will and he felt faint again.

The boy was red in the face and reached forward to grasp Will by the waist. He could already feel the warmth emanating from his naked skin. Just a second and he would touch him. This was a dream come true. Unfortunately for Nate, Will produced a second life-jacket that he slipped on, instantly covering his body. Gone was Will's nudity, gone was Nate's dream.

"Grab the handles," Will instructed.

Nate did as told but grimaced in bitter disappointment. His reaction amused Mike who chuckled in spite of himself. Making fun of the poor boy was cruel but Nate looked so offended, Mike couldn't help it! This, plus the relief he felt at seeing Will finally covered. That was much better!

“We’ll be back for lunch!” Will announced.

Mike nodded. Will pushed on the button and the jet went off slowly. Mike stayed a bit, watching them take on speed. He could hear Nate’s voice, cheering in excitement and the knot in his chest was back for a second. Seeing Nate leave into the horizon with his former lover was odd and a bit scary. He didn’t know why but it looked like a page turned and replaced. A feeling he didn’t appreciate one bit.

He returned to the deck by the swimming pool. An elder woman was cleaning it, using a fishnet and a Hoover. Ravi was already at the table, eating breakfast alone.

“Good morning!” he greeted when he saw him.

Mike retreated his lips in a smile, “Morning!”

He joined the man at the table, facing the pool, and served himself a cup of coffee.

“Did you sleep well?” Ravi asked, sipping from his own mug.

Mike nodded, “Very well. And you?”

“I woke up a bit earlier than I’d wished but I’m ok.”

They were silent for a little while. Mike assessed the food available in front of him and opted for toasts, butter and jam.

“I take it that Nate and Will are off for their little tour?” Ravi continued.

“Moments ago. Will said they’ll be back for lunch.”

Ravi nodded, “The island is rather small and Will wouldn’t venture too far anyway.”

Mike didn’t respond and began to eat his toasts, dipped in coffee. Ravi suddenly turned toward the woman who supposedly was their maid. She was fighting with the Hoover, trying to make it fit into an overflowing cupboard.

“Dejo esto aqui, Maria,” he said, “Nos encargaremos. Gracias.”

The woman blinked and focused her attention on Ravi, wiping her hands on her dress. She gave a short nod and returned inside the house.

The two men were silent for a little while, enjoying their breakfast on their own. They had known each other for a decade but rarely really talked. Mike was Will's ex boyfriend after all. To Ravi, it must have been awkward, although the other man never made any mention of discomfort in Mike's presence. Given his relationship with Will and the nature of their job, Mike doubted very much Ravi could ever feel something akin to jealousy. And if he could, it didn't make any sense he stayed with Will!

He frowned, lost in thoughts. He could hear the maid cleaning the rooms beyond the walls and closed doors of the big house. He and Jezebel wouldn't have said no to some help too. Sure, their own house didn't compare in terms of size but they were five of them living in that house, a young child included. But they couldn't afford a maid. They struggled already enough with the school bills!

“Don't worry about Nate. Will won't do anything stupid with your kid in his care!”

The unexpected sound of Ravi's baritone voice startled Mike out of his muttering. For a second, he had almost forgotten about the presence of the other man and found himself momentarily confused.

“What?” he mumbled, still dazed.

“You look concerned,” Ravi explained, “I suppose it's about your son. I know you're not a fan of dangerous activities. But you can trust Will. He would never endanger Nate. Even if he goes over the top sometimes when he's alone, he'd never do that with Nate in his charge.”

Mike blinked. He had almost forgotten about his son and that ride.

“I know,” he said, trying to sound convincing in his role of the worried father, “I don't like it though. Those machines are dangerous.

But I do trust Will. I just don't want Nate to get accustomed to it. He pestered me and his mother for a motorcycle the other day. He wants one for his birthday!"

Ravi observed the grumpy father of three with a smirk.

"I do remember finding a picture of you on a motorcycle at Nate's age on one of the shelves in your house!" he joked.

Mike rolled his eyes, his lips parting in an open-mouth smile.

"Times were different then," he said, "It wasn't as dangerous as now! Teens do absolute nonsense nowadays. In my time, we were a lot more careful."

There was a pause. Ravi hadn't said anything. He hadn't looked away and was still observing Mike with an amused expression. Mike noticed and let go of a sigh, shaking his head slowly.

"I do speak like an old man, don't I?" he said.

"You speak like my dad," Ravi answered, still smiling.

Mike chuckled. The chuckle turned into a genuine laugh. Ravi joined. Their hilarity lasted a full minute before Mike sobered up in his cup of coffee, taking a sip to get his composure back. Ravi mimicked him and silence returned for a short while.

"You never thought of having children yourself?" Mike suddenly asked.

Ravi swallowed a sip of tea and shook his head, "Not really. I mean, to my parents this was supposed to be my future. You know, married to a nice Paki girl. Bunch of kids. But when I came out, even to myself, being gay was incompatible with becoming a parent. Children and families were a straight people thing. So I never gave much thought about that. It was just natural, I guess. I can't really miss something I never expected to have in the first place."

Mike nodded. He knew very well what Ravi meant. Up until marrying Jezebel, he never thought he'd be a dad.

"Where is your friend?" Mike said, changing the subject.

"Ricardo?"

"Yes."

"He left early in the morning."

Mike nodded, biting into his toast, "Jezebel will be sorely disappointed!"

Ravi snickered but didn't comment.

"Sorry about last night by the way," Mike continued, "I was being rude to your guest for no reason."

Ravi shook his head, "Don't worry about that. Rick is a huge flirt. You had every right to be jealous! She's your wife."

"But I'm far from being the best husband..." Mike responded.

"Don't say that," Ravi admonished.

There was a pause. Mike stared at his coffee with a frown, looking at the small bubbles of condescended water die against the blue ceramic.

"How do you do it?" he whispered after a while.

Ravi stilled, his bite of muffin still in mouth, "Do what?"

"Aren't you ever jealous? Surely, seeing Will with all those men must make you feel something somehow? Don't you ever wish for exclusivity?"

He couldn't have been the only one.

There was a long pause. Ravi was no longer eating. He was observing Mike with the most serious expression, studying him. After a full minute of silence, he wiped his mouth with a napkin and looked away, toward the pitcher of orange juice that he grabbed by the handle.

"My relationship with Will is very different from yours, Mike. You started dating in school when you were both teenagers. Your Will was still anonymous, uncomfortable in his skin and a sex phobic virgin! The Will I met was seventeen years older, an already huge pornstar, famous and overly confident. I knew what I was getting myself into when I accepted to go out with him and exclusivity was never really part of the deal, not the way you see it anyway. I knew him before I even met him. And I was already enamored! My relationship with Will is basically a Rock star dating one of his fans. It's not exactly what you and Will had. And I'm fine with that. I've accepted the rules or I wouldn't be here."

Mike didn't respond and observed Ravi with a small frown of pity. This nice man deserved better. Mike loved Will but Will was like a seed, planting himself deep underneath his prey's skin to never let go.

"What do you mean, you're having a kid?!"

"Will, please, I can explain," Mike tried to say, pushing his hand in front of him as a shield.

He tried again and again but Will wouldn't stop screaming and he barely avoided the vase that came to crash on the wall behind him.

"Will? Are you ok?"

Will blinked and turned his attention on Nate who was looking at him with concern. They had parked the jet in the small creek Will particularly appreciated. A small piece of land with a tiny beach, white sand and turquoise water. There wasn't a single cloud above them. The sky was a vivid shade of blue and reflected in the sea that came gently lapping at the rocks they were perched on.

"Sorry, I was lost in thoughts," he gave Nate a fond smile, appeasing the boy's doubts, "I was enjoying the surroundings," he looked back

at the horizon before them, “It’s easy to lose yourself in those colors.”

“It’s beautiful,” Nate agreed, “Thanks for taking me here.”

“I’m glad you like it. I often come here when I want to relax and be by myself.”

Nate frowned, “So, it’s like, your special spot?”

“Yes, you can say it is.”

They were silent for a short while. Nate’s heart was beating in his chest so fast, he was almost sure Will could hear it. What an amazing ride! Although, he could understand why his father was afraid and didn’t enjoy it. He did get rolled around by the speed, even though Will wasn’t going as fast as he usually drove, Nate could tell!

They had ridden on the jet for about twenty minutes and Nate hadn’t let go off the handles, as instructed by Will. He would have lied if he’d said he wasn’t disappointed Will hadn’t been shirtless. More than once, his cheek bumped into the fabric of his life-jacket and instead of the cold unpleasant fabric, he wished he had met Will’s warm skin. Not to mention that he hadn’t been able to live his fantasy of holding Will’s bare waist as the man rode off into the sunset.

He shouldn’t have been surprised though. Will was never short of modesty when he was around him and his sisters. It really was annoying.

“I’m glad to be here with you,” he confessed, “I missed you.”

To tried ears, this sounded like a lover’s plea but Will simply turned towards Nate with a warm smile and ruffled his hair, much like his dad did when he was happy with him.

“I missed you guys, too,” he said.

Nate swallowed a lump. Will’s touch had left his legs trembling but the words that accompanied the gesture got the air stuck in his lungs.

Will was unaware of Nate's disappointment and resumed his contemplation of the sea.

"I'm sorry I didn't call so much. I've been awfully busy with the promotion of the film. It was kind of crazy."

Nate composed himself again and forced a smile on his lips.

"It's ok. I'm really happy for you. You work so hard. You deserve that success."

Will smiled back, "Thanks kiddo. I appreciate it."

Nate beamed at him, feeling his cheeks color.

"I can't wait to see it!" he said, "I'm sure it's worth all the praise it got!"

Nate expected Will to encourage his support and be glad but his brow broke into a scowl and he shook his head.

"I don't really want you to watch it to be honest," Will responded softly, "I can't forbid it, of course, but I would appreciate if you didn't."

"Why not?" Nate asked in a poorly contained wail.

"Don't get me wrong," Will hurried to say, "I do thank you for your enthusiasm and support. You're a sweet kid. But I'm not comfortable at all with you watching that movie. There are many scenes in it I really don't want you to see."

"You mean sex," Nate retorted in a spat.

"Yes, but not just that. It's... not a movie for kids, Nate."

Nate's frown deepened. He felt cheated.

"I watch *Game of Thrones* , you know. And *Skins* . And the latest movie I saw was *Mysterious Skin* !"

Will shrugged, "Maybe you do. But I'm not responsible for those

scenes.”

“So I can watch R-rated stuff as long as you’re not personally involved?!”

Will took a deep breath.

“I don’t expect you to understand. If you were my kid, I would probably advise you not to watch shows like *Game of Thrones* but you’re your own person and I can’t force you not to watch them. *The Man of Average* is my film. It comes from my psyche, my memories, my feelings, my personal experiences with life. I don’t want you to be in that part of my mind and I don’t want you to watch graphic scenes I personally wrote and directed.”

“Why not?” Nate insisted, “I’m not a baby! I’ve seen hard stuff before! You’re right, I don’t understand. You keep saying we shouldn’t conceal sex from teenagers and now you don’t want me to support your work because it’s *not for kids* ! That doesn’t make any sense!”

Will licked his lip and threw his head backwards.

“Have you ever supported my work before?”

The question left Nate out of words.

“What?” the boy croaked.

“You say that you want to support my work like it’s something you’re used to doing already,” Will said, “So I’m asking, have you ever supported my work before?”

Nate’s eyes widened in fear, his lips parted in shock.

“No!” he blurted out loudly and the lie hurt his ears deep.

“Then why is it suddenly so important?” Will gently pried, “I get it, it won an Award and everyone’s talking about it. But that’s not a reason for you to suddenly get an active interest in what I do for a living.”

Nate looked down, feeling very sad and rejected.

“Sorry...”

Will’s warm hand fell on his shoulder, squeezing it.

“It’s ok,” he whispered, close to Nate’s face, “I really appreciate your enthusiasm. You’re adorable. But please, Nate, stay away from my work. You’re like my own kid. You watching any of my films makes me really, really sick.”

“I watch porn, you know,” Nate said in a pout.

“I suppose you do and you can watch porn if you want, as long as you know what you’re watching and that you don’t watch mine.”

“Ok...”

There was a pause. Nate was upset, Will lost in thoughts. The nice mood had turned sour.

“Nate,” Will began slowly, “Can I ask you something? And I want you to be honest.”

Nate’s heart missed a beat in alarm. He had a bad feeling about that.

“Sure...”

Will turned to look at him with a serious expression and at that very moment, he had his father’s expression the day he confronted him about the pictures.

“Have you ever Googled me?”

Nate swallowed. Anything he would answer would be bad. He would either be lying or blowing his cover. All in all, he was screwed. Will was doubting him.

“Please, tell me the truth,” the man pressed and Nate felt as if a knife was being pushed against his throat.

“Maybe once or twice,” he stammered, “You’re so famous... I was curious...”

Ok, this wasn't so bad. Not a complete lie but not the death sentencing truth.

Will nodded, "Ok... Have you ever watched any of my adult films?"

Nate's blood turned cold. Sweat broke on his scowl. He wouldn't be able to keep the mask for long.

"No," he stuttered and it was a miracle Will believed him, if he did.

The man remained silent for a moment, observing the boy's reaction and Nate's body suddenly flushed to a hundred degrees.

"You promise?"

"Yes."

"Nate, it's important. I really don't want you to watch that."

Will was so close to him, it was making everything worse.

"Why?"

"Because it's repulsive. You're like my kid. You wouldn't watch your dad in action, right?"

"No!" Nate answered with a grimace of sheer disgust.

"Then don't watch me."

Nate swallowed and tried to nod. He was feeling completely exposed. His fear and proximity with Will's face got to his head and he blinked, entranced by Will's beauty. His sparkling eyes, tan complexion and pink mouth. Just a step forward, only one, and he would kiss those tantalizing lips. A moment. An impulse. A pulse. His neck twitched. His lips parted in anticipating. They were so close.

"Alright kiddo, let's go!" Will suddenly said, jumping on his feet, "I still have a couple of cliffs to show you!"

Nate froze, still crouched and flushed, puzzled and aroused.

The first week passed in a blur.

From time to time, Will would leave for a few hours for an interview or any other work-related errands. Sometimes, he went alone, others Ravi accompanied him. Mike didn't like it and wished Will would just stay with him all day but he couldn't prevent Will from working either.

He spent most of his time with Will and when he wasn't *with* Will, he spent the rest watching him with barely concealed longing. They didn't do much besides swimming pool and beach activities. They played cards, ate, drank, napped, read. Will proposed a game of tennis table once but Mike was unable to keep the pace and was left out of breath hardly half an hour into the match, leaving his son to replace him with a smug smile Mike took days to forget.

After that, Mike was so humiliated that he decided to join Will in his work out sessions to save what could be saved of his physical misery before realizing that those sessions were way too intense for a man who hadn't lifted anything heavier than a beer bottle in seven years and he spent the morning hour mostly yearning for the sweating man beside him on the treadmill with so much buzzing energy beneath his clothes, it proved to be more embarrassing than productive when Will finally noticed.

Will worked out a lot. He never was much of a gym rat in his youth but ever since he started doing porn, he developed an impressive enthusiasm for anything body related. He ran eight kilometers a day, did forty-five minutes of cardio and thirty minutes of muscle building that he obviously didn't really need as far as Mike was concerned. He looked already way too much in shape. Will argued that if he stopped, his hard-gained muscles would turn to fat but Mike was sure Will exaggerated.

Mike didn't complain. Quite contrary. Watching Will work out was a treat. Cruel to his poor closeted heart and body but a treat nonetheless. Just as seeing Will walk back to the shore from a swim in the sea was. Well, *that* was sinful to be honest. But Mike wasn't

complaining. Aching, longing, wishing as he stared at this body that belonged in a modelling magazine. But not complaining.

No, the problem was that he wasn't the *only one* enjoying the show of Will showing off skin and testosterone rushes. Someone else was and unfortunately not the most legitimate. Nate was having his fair share of Will eye candy. More than once, Mike noticed his son going weak in the knee as Will disrobed in front of them to jump in the pool or stare longingly from behind the window at him doing push ups. And it looked like his face was trying to fuse into the glass.

Mike glared at him and shooed him away but it didn't really work.

Because Nate was living the best summer of his life. He could see his beloved everyday and most of the time barely clothed. They played in the pool, listened to music and talked about famous artists and painting techniques. It was wonderful.

Just in a lapse of two days, Nate had felt Will's hands on him at least twenty five times. Ok, Nate did most of the work, splashing Will and always searching for his touch but Will *did* touch him - his shoulders mostly when he pushed him into the water because Nate had tackled him playfully but that was a start... It made Nate's body shake all over and he felt so warm everywhere, the water was never cool enough.

Seeing Will shirtless so close was a real treat. The man was *so* good-looking, he hadn't been ranked in the top 5 of the sexiest men in magazines for nothing! It wasn't just the body. Will's face was also flawless. He had such harmonious traits, Nate lost himself in contemplation whenever he could. Jessy pulled his leg at every text they exchanged, calling him a hopeless old man lover but Nate didn't care. He was determined to make the most of those two weeks and if he could earn a few points in Will's favors, he wouldn't hesitate.

They hadn't talked about Will's videos again and Nate was glad. With a bit of luck, Will had even forgotten all about it. Besides, Will was too busy trying to impress Mike to linger on such triviality.

He wasn't stupid. He could see the little games between his father and Will and it was both pathetic and infuriating. Pathetic because Mike was completely out of Will's league, unable to sustain a game of table tennis more than fifteen minutes without looking like a mop and infuriating because damn, Will was still trying *so hard* to get Mike's attention and for what? Nothing. His father kept sending him away and rejected every feeble attempt at flirting on Will's side. It was such a waste.

Nate was certain he could do so much better.

The best part of this holiday, apart from Will's presence, was the house. It was amazing and it was Will's world. Will had shot movies in that house, lived in it in so many different ways. He bought the furniture, walked in every room, bathed in every tub. Will was a bit everywhere.

Nate knew he pushed his luck a bit too far sometimes, especially after the conversation they did have back in the creek about the videos. He knew he had to keep a low profile not to arise Will's suspicions. He just couldn't help it. When Will was around, he had no control over his body.

The first time he splashed Will to play, Will looked surprised by his behavior and it took him a moment of adaptation to splash him back. When Nate jumped on his back in the pool to drown him - a *very* risky move thinking about it backwards - he wrapped his legs around Will's waist with an almost lover-like intensity.

Will didn't seem to mind or notice and Nate used his lack of protest to his advantage.

He did things he wasn't proud of. Like waiting for Will and Ravi to leave for work to sneak into their room and collapse on the bed, inhaling the bedsheets where Will slept - and probably made love too - and touching himself there, laid flat on his stomach with Will's pillow stuck to his nose. This was wrong, he knew that. Just as stealing clothes and keeping them in his own room, hidden beneath the mattress, burying his face into Will's underpants whenever he was alone and locked up. That was *very* wrong. But it was the most intimate he could ever be with Will.

At first, Mike chose to ignore it. His son was young. He was enamored. It wasn't anything serious. He could try and look elsewhere. Pretend he wasn't seeing anything.

But then, things turned oddly awkward and he couldn't look away any longer. When Nate and Will played in the pool, splashing, tackling, drowning each other... There was... something. Something that Mike didn't like. The way Will's hands clapped on Nate's waist and shoulders to pull him underwater or make him spin and fall to the ground in a display of strength superiority. How they chased each other on the beach. The laugh, the wrestling on the sand...

Sure, Will was probably totally unaware of the real cause behind this quest for familiarity and played with the mind and heart of innocence but Mike knew Nate wasn't. There wasn't any hesitation in the way his son searched for Will's touch. There wasn't any hesitation in the way he bit his lip when Will played back. There wasn't any hesitation in how his eyes raked over Will's body, the same way Mike's did.

And that was disturbing.

Because they were seeing the same things, looking the same way, trying different approaches. Mike was distant, uncomfortable. Nate was eager and straightforward. And for the moment, it seemed that Nate was winning.

And Mike didn't like that.

Things escalated during a game of bowling at the end of the week.

It was raining that afternoon and Ravi suggested they take the boat to the village to the small bowling alley. The kids had never bowled before and were excited.

The game started nice.

Ravi explained the rules and showed the girls how to play, taking them into his team. Julie adored Ravi and stuck up to him whenever she could. Nate immediately heckled Will to be in his team and began to show off - albeit poorly - his (lack off) bowling skills. Was it deliberate or not, Mike couldn't tell. All he knew was that Will laughed and spent a good five minutes correcting the boy's position, much to Nate's obvious delight.

"Not like this," he said grabbing the teenager's wrist, "Be more flexible, like that."

He was talking very close to Nate's ear, as if whispering, and Mike's heartbeat increased.

His free hand trailed down to tap at Nate's lower back with his fingers.

"Straighten up," he instructed, his lips still too close to the boy's ear, "You need to use the strength in your legs to throw with a good balance."

Mike wasn't sure but it looked like Nate was shaking. He frowned. Was Will... Was he... *flirting* with his son? No! That wasn't right! Will would never do that. Mike was only projecting Nate's feelings on Will's behavior. He was seeing things!

Nate nodded, licked his lip and threw the ball that slid down the lane and hit three pins. He turned and beamed at Will, proud.

Will smiled, "Nice!"

"Thanks Will!" the boy answered, his face flushed.

Will winked at him, "You're welcome, kiddo!"

He returned to his spot, taking his own ball and threw it effortlessly. The ball slid down with speed and hit all the pins at once in a strike.

They played for a good hour.

Nothing awkward happened at first. Ravi played well too. A gentle competition began between him and his man to see who made the

most points. Mike didn't want to know what would be the winner's reward.

After forty-minutes into the game, Nate tried a figure with his ball - probably to impress Will - but the ball was heavier than what his hand could sustain and he hurt his wrist and arm in the process. He hissed in pain and let the ball fall heavily to the ground, clutching to his injured arm.

Before Mike or Jezebel could say anything, Will flew to the boy's rescue in alarm.

"Are you alright?" he asked.

"I'm fine," Nate answered although with a grimace that didn't really convince them he was.

Will frowned and grabbed the boy's wrist in his hand for the second time.

"You may have strained a muscle," he said, "It's nothing."

It could have stopped there but it didn't.

Instead of releasing the boy and returning to his own game, he stepped behind Nate, still holding his hand, and began to rub his arm and shoulder, drawing circles in the air to stretch the muscles.

Mike's breath caught in his throat as he watched his former lover give his son a massage. His thoughts had frozen in his brain. He couldn't blink or move or speak. A part of him wanted to pull Will away from his kid and put an end to the awkward eroticism that accompanied every gesture of Will's hands on his underage son's shoulders. Nate had his eyes half close. Mixed sounds of pain and pleasure escaped his parted lips. He was enjoying himself. Mike could easily understand why, he did remember how good Will was with his hands.

After a couple of minutes, Will let go and stepped back.

"Better?" he inquired.

Nate was so red in the face, he looked ready to faint or burst.

“Yes, thank you, Will.”

His voice was weak, almost panting.

Will winked at him, “Be careful, ok?”

“Yes.”

Another wink and Will was back to playing as if nothing happened. Mike blinked and remained completely stunned for the rest of the game.

He didn't know what to do. He was lost. On one hand, Will hadn't done anything wrong. On the other, his little games with Nate couldn't continue. Even if Will wasn't aware of Nate's true affection, this was going too far. But he couldn't accuse Will and he didn't want to betray his son either.

He could have spoken to his wife for council but Jezebel had been strangely distant for the last few days, as if something was deeply troubling her. Whatever it was, it had to be important because she hadn't said anything about Will and Nate. Ordinary, she would have been the first to point out the obvious and accuse Will of the worst. Even during the game, she had looked lost in her thoughts, away from Mike and their children.

It seemed that Mike was alone in this.

And he would have let it go if this hadn't continued after they returned home.

Will didn't give his son another massage but the unwelcome familiarity persisted during dinner. They sat beside the other and kept exchanging smiles, whispers and knowing glances for no apparent reason. Mike barely ate, too busy glaring at them but they didn't seem to notice, Nate bending to whisper something in Will's ear and Will chuckling before bending forward too. What the Hell were they playing at? Didn't Will realize his behavior was totally

uncalled for?

After dinner, Ravi, Jezebel and the girls cleaned the table. Nate rose from his chair and dove to the side toward Will to tickle him. Will dodged the attack and grabbed the teenagers's hands in his grip playfully, smiling at him with a smug expression. Once Nate's hands immobilized in his, he struck and poked the teenager's sides with the other. Nate jumped, tittered and tried to escape but Will was too strong. The game lasted a minute and Will released him.

Mike watched, powerless, the exchange, feeling more and more uneasy. A last detail finished to turn the tables in his heart and mind.

Right before he let go of Nate's hand, Will kept his fingers crooked into Nate's, as if to make the touch last extra seconds more. A tiny, barely noticeable gesture that didn't go unnoticed for Mike. And that detail was the last straw he needed. His eyes squinted in a frown, the foul taste he'd had lingering in his mouth for days becoming unbearable.

He waited after everyone had retreated in the house to follow Will to his room.

Will was obsessed with dental hygiene and used a dental floss after each meal. Mike found him in his private bathroom, flossing in front of the mirror. When Will saw him in his reflection, he gave him a quick gesture of the head, turned the faucet and rinsed his mouth.

Mike stayed in the room by the bed. He was feeling terribly edgy. What he was about to do wasn't right but he needed answers. Urgently. His mind wouldn't rest before he had and right now, he was so enraged, troubled and confused than any conclusion was good to take. Even the most unpleasant ones.

"Mike!" Will said when he was finished, returning to the part of the room that was made to sleep.

Mike retreated his lips in a constricted smile.

"Need something?" the other man continued.

Mike didn't speak immediately. He was looking at Will, his brain buzzing from too many emotions at once. Had Will really betrayed him? Had he and Nate been playing him all along? Nate promised nothing ever happened with Will but Mike was beginning to have his doubts, especially after all that he'd seen those past few days.

"We need to talk," Mike blurted out.

Will frowned, "Sure. What's wrong?"

He walked past Mike to the dresser against the wall and slipped his shirt over his head.

"It was fun today, uhm?!" he said, not waiting for Mike to speak.

Mike wasn't looking at him. He buried his nose in his hands and kept them pressed up as if in a prayer before taking a deep breath.

"I hadn't played in ages," Will continued, changing into another shirt, "I wasn't sure I was still any good but I guess I can still hold a title, right!" he winked at Mike.

"Are you fucking my kid?"

The question left Mike's lips and the words remained stuck in the air around them for long seconds, misplaced in the gentle rambling Will just started. Slowly, very slowly, Will turned toward him, his hands still clutching at the edge of his shirt and offered Mike his most confused expression.

"What?"

Mike took a step back. There, he'd said it and he was regretting already.

"I'm sorry, Will. I know how it sounds but I really need to know."

"Are you trying to be funny? Because if you are, that's a huge fail. I'm not amused."

"I just need to know," Mike repeated.

“You need to know if I’m having sexual intercourse with your underage son?! Are you for real?!”

Mike swallowed, “Yes. I’m sorry... It’s just... with the erotic display of earlier...”

“What erotic display?!”

“Oh come on, Will! Stop it! The massage you gave to my son!”

Will opened his mouth in protest, “How was that erotic?! He strained his shoulder! I was only helping him! It was medical assistance! Damn!”

Mike sighed, putting his hand over his head.

“I’ve been accused of horrible things all through my career... But this... This goes beyond everything! Especially coming from you!” he insisted on the last word, pointing at Mike with a finger.

“Will -”

“You know Mike, if you want some *erotic* display, I’m gonna show you erotic and I can assure you’ll see a goddamn difference from what happened with your son!” he yelled.

Mike shook at that. Will was clearly upset.

“Will -” he tried again but Will didn’t let him speak.

“How dare you?” Will continued, “How can you even for a second believe something so *disgusting* of me! You have a minute to explain yourself before I kick you out of my house!”

Mike inhaled sharply. He was feeling stupid.

“I know, I know. It’s just that you and Nate are so close... You’re always fooling around, whispering things... Touching...”

“We fool around because the kid likes spending time with me and we get along fine but that’s it! How can you even think it could be something else than that?!”

Mike huffed, "Oh, he likes more than just spending time with you!"

Will frowned, "What?"

Mike made a pause. He had said too much already. Will looked totally confused as if Mike's words truly didn't make any sense to him and his bewilderment comforted Mike somehow. It looked genuine.

"You really don't know, do you?" he said.

"Know what?"

Mike swallowed. He didn't want to betray Nate's trust. He didn't. But this was going too far and it would have been irresponsible of Mike not to intervene when he still could. Telling Will was his duty as a father. He needed to protect his son, even from himself.

"Nate is in love with you."

His admission was followed by complete silence. Will stared at Mike, agape and stupefied for a long minute.

"What?" he whispered and his voice sounded out of oxygen.

Mike bit his lip, "I found hundreds of pictures of you in his computer. Nudes. When I confronted him, he confessed being sexually attracted to you... I don't know if he's really in love - he's a teenager - but you're definitely his favorite porn fantasy."

Will didn't say anything. He collapsed on the bed, looking drained of strength and energy.

"Mike I," he began in a breath, "I swear to you I never meant for Nate to see me in any other way than another father figure. I swear..."

Mike bit his lip. He was feeling bad for Will. The man looked shaken.

"Sorry for the bombshell," he said, sitting beside him on the edge of the bed. "But come on, you work in the sex industry. You mean to tell me that you never noticed the way Nate looks at you? Never? All the pheromones he's sending your way? Whenever you touch him,

it's like he's gonna have an orgasm!"

Will shook his head, "No. I... No. I mean, yes, the boy is affectionate and expressive and maybe a little too curious for his own good. And I noticed some blushing once or twice. I just thought that maybe I intimidated him because I'm famous and older. I thought that he kind of saw me as a role model. But in a completely innocent way! I never thought... God. I'm sorry, Mike."

"It's not your fault. It seems that the Willsexual gene is rampant in this family!"

"If you tell me Shelley wants to have a ride too, I'm gonna vomit!"

"No. The gene is only for boys apparently."

Will shook his head, "It's a bloody nightmare!"

Mike chuckled, "You sound like Ravi!"

"Do you want me to speak to Nate?" Will offered.

Mike shook his head, "I don't know. I don't want him to know that I betrayed his trust. I did promise I wouldn't say anything... Just, try to put more distance with Nate. Physically. Don't encourage his affection if you can."

"I won't lie, Mike, this situation makes me really uncomfortable."

"I know."

"That explains a few things though."

Mike turned toward him, "Like what?"

"Nate was adamant to see my film the other day. I was kind of puzzled by his need to support my work. Now, I understand why."

"He watches your movies, you know. Once I walked on him with his hand buried under the sheet. I'm pretty sure he was jerking on your cock."

Will grimaced, "Please, stop! I'm gonna puke, I swear."

Mike observed him with a small smile, "Who's the prude now?"

"Oh shut up!" he sighed, "I had doubts about that... The fact that he'd seen my movies but I thought it was just misplaced curiosity. Not... that. Obviously, I'm such an idiot. I knew he was lying but I wanted to believe him."

"You asked Nate if he watched your films?"

"Yes. After witnessing such... enthusiasm for my movie, I had some doubts I wanted to clarify."

"And he told you he didn't?"

"He lied to my face. A part of me knew he was lying but I didn't want to linger too much on that."

There was a pause. Will was still trying to digest everything Mike had said and all that he'd purposely ignored.

"Willsexual, eh..." he muttered after a while.

"That's a thing!" Mike replied.

Will chuckled, "Stop it!"

Mike smiled, "Stop what?!"

"You know..."

Will bumped his shoulder into Mike. Mike bumped back in a laugh. Their faces turned toward the other. They were close. Way closer than anticipated and their noses almost touched. Will swallowed and stared. He stared at the stubble on Mike's cheeks, at the creaks around his eyes, the small wrinkles above his nose bridge, the nose a bit larger, the skin pores more apparent. He stared at his lips, thinner than before, a bit less red too. He stared at his eyes. His gorgeous dark eyes. At his hair, graying by the temples. The face of a middle-aged man, a mature man. A beautiful man. A man he wanted to kiss, desperately...

Mike was staring too, staring at Will's sun-kissed face, his sparkling green eyes, his aquiline nose, his pink lips... Will's face was ageless, not youthful but not old either. He wondered if Will had done some surgery, used some products to keep this perfected beauty the lie it probably was. Only his eyes betrayed him when you looked close enough, slightly wrinkled at the corners. His neck was thicker too, his face larger, skin harder and his smell too masculine. He swallowed, inhaling the sharp scent of Will's cologne.

Will was so close.

He bent an inch, meeting Will forward and Will's breath hit his mouth.

It would take only a moment, he knew it, a moment between them. How many times had he dreamed of tasting those lips again. The image of Jezebel suddenly popped in his mind. He was a despicable husband but he wouldn't be that despicable. There was a line he wouldn't cross.

Will reached to touch his cheek with his fingers, growing closer to his face but Mike pulled away, clearing his throat as if to clear the air.

Will sighed, licking his lips in disappointment.

"Mike..." he begged.

He grabbed him by the shoulder, pulling him forward again but Mike shrugged his hand off.

"No, Will," he said, taking Will's hand in his to kiss his knuckles, "I can't. I won't do that to Jez."

He kissed Will's hand again and let it go.

"You don't even love her..." Will noted weakly.

Mike walked off the bed, "She's my wife," he said, "Besides, we were talking about my son's feelings for you. This is totally inappropriate. I have to go. Please, keep your distance with Nate. That's all I'm asking."

He stared at the other man, humbled on the bed, hunched and broken and he felt his heart ache. Will met his eyes and the pain in Mike's chest intensified. He looked so beautiful, exposed on this bed. Human and vulnerable. Far from the narcissistic billionaire he played daily so well. For a second Mike wanted to forget about his stupid vows, his son, their issues and crossed back the distance to that bed to claim those lips he missed so much.

But he didn't do it. It would have been inappropriate.

He remained by the door, swallowing his feelings away. He nodded again and turned on his heels, grabbing the handle to leave, Will's teary eyes still burning holes on his back.

At the same moment, Ravi walked in, startling Mike, almost bumping into him.

"Hey!" he said, surprised.

Mike took a step back into the room.

"Hey Ravi!" he replied, trying to keep his composure intact.

Ravi didn't move. He stayed on the threshold, half in, half out, observing Mike leaving the room and his boyfriend sprawled on the bed like a grieving widow. Mike smiled at him with his lips fully retracted and avoided any more awkwardness by walking past the door, taking the opportune moment to flee his own temptations.

Ravi watched him walk off with a frown and turned his attention to Will, his hand still on the door frame.

"Is everything alright?" he asked.

He wasn't a dupe. Will was completely slumped on the bed, as if he'd just been dumped. Which was probably the case knowing the two.

"It's not what you think," Will croaked, anticipating Ravi's thoughts albeit too late.

"Mmh, mmh..." Ravi said, closing the door, "And what do I think?"

Will straightened up, sniffing, “Something wrong.”

Ravi nodded, walking toward the bed, to gather the upset man in his arms.

“What did Mike do again?”

Will rolled his head on Ravi’s shoulder and let himself be cuddled.

“Nothing.”

“I don’t believe you.”

Ravi’s right hand grabbed Will’s head and he kissed his temple tenderly, petting the soft hair with the tip of his fingers. Will remained silent for a little while, enjoying the comfort of his lover’s arms around him.

“He said something I didn’t like...”

“About what?”

“Nate.”

Ravi frowned, he had a bad feeling about that.

“What about Nate?”

Will sighed and searched his words for a moment.

“The kid likes me. Apparently. Can you believe that?”

There was a moment of pause. Ravi’s frown deepened.

“Aye, babe. I can.”

Will turned to look at him in haste, “Did you know?”

Ravi sighed and shook his head, “Come on, Will, don’t be daft. It’s pretty obvious. The only reason you haven’t noticed before is because you didn’t want to.”

“So I’m naive now.”

“When it comes to Nate, aye, you are. The boy has literal heart eyes when he looks at you. He’s blushing so hard, it’s like all the blood from his body’s rushed to his face! You know, I even made bets with myself as to when you’d finally figure it out.”

“Dammit...” Will muttered.

“Why did Mike tell you?”

“Apparently we’re too close and he didn’t appreciate the erotic massage I gave his son...”

Ravi bit his lip.

“What?” Will pressed.

“It was kind of awkward...”

Will pushed him away, “What?!”

“Will, please, don’t get me wrong, I know you probably didn’t mean to but I can see why Mike was troubled. It was... intense.”

Will grimaced, “Ew, please, stop.”

“It’s not your fault. You’re sexual in everything you do. Even when you’re not aware of it.”

“Because I’m a pervert, I know.”

“No. Because you’re a flirt.”

“I’m not *flirting* with Nate!” Will insisted.

“I know you don’t mean to,” Ravi tried calmly, “It’s just part of who you are. You can’t help it.”

Will shook his head, pressing his back against the dresser.

“I didn’t know I was that gross...” he muttered, depressed.

“Will...”

“What am I going to do? I never meant for Nate to develop those... feelings! Loonie was right! I’m Evil! I corrupt everything I touch!”

“Will, stop it! You’re not Evil! Nate’s feelings are perfectly logical. You’re bloody hot and a pornstar! Plus, you have so much in common with him! The boy is sexually confused, hormonal and slowly growing into a man. It’s not very difficult to understand what happened! Don’t blame yourself. You didn’t do anything wrong.”

Will shook his head and returned to sit on the bed.

“Are you going to confront him?” Ravi asked.

“No. Mike wants me to keep my distance not to encourage his affection,” he paraphrased, purposefully omitting the part where he and Mike almost kissed.

Ravi frowned, “You mean, snob the kid?”

“Yes.”

“Honestly, I don’t think it’s the right thing to do. Nate will not understand. You’ll upset him for no reason. Talk to him. Tell him you heard rumors and that you’d like to have a chat. Don’t mention his dad. Speak to him now because if you don’t, Nate will keep reading everything you say and do the wrong way and that won’t help.”

“I’ll break his heart.”

“Well, yah. But better sooner than later. Trust me. Right now, any word coming from you sounds like a marriage proposal to his ears.”

Will gagged and shook his head.

“Alright, alright. I’ll see how I’ll handle that...”

There was a pause. Will was still lost in thoughts.

“You know,” he said after a while, “The other day, when I was showing Nate around the creek, at one moment, I had the disturbing impression he was going to kiss him. I thought I was seeing things and that I was being a crazy perv. Obviously, I wasn’t.”

Ravi frowned and put his hand on Will's shoulder.

"I hate this, Rav..."

"I know, babe but it's gonna be alright. It's just a crush. It'll pass. Nate will meet a boy his age and he'll forget all about you. Give him time. You'll see."

Will let his head fall in the crook of Ravi's neck and Ravi stroked his temple gently.

"What would I do without you..."

"You'd be in a lot of trouble..."

Will chuckled, "That's true..." he smiled and pecked the other man on the cheek, "I love you, Rav."

Ravi felt his cheeks color. He was a privileged man, he knew this.

Notes for the Chapter:

Tell me what you thought of it!!!

6. Drifting

Summary for the Chapter:

"He was feeling. Feeling everything. Feeling so much. Feeling too much. He'd never experienced anything this intense before. It was wilder than everything he could have imagined, his fantasies not even coming close to the reality of it."

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello everyone, here comes the newest chapter! It was a bit challenging to write but I hope you'll like it.

WARNING: read the tags! That's all I have to say.

Will remained vegetative for days.

He smiled and answered when spoken too, ate during dinner, shared wine and smoked a few cigarettes. But for the rest, he just wasn't there. For hours, he just sat on a bench by the beach, lost in thoughts, asking himself times and times again how he missed it and where he screwed up.

He'd always considered his relationship with Nate a privileged one. They had a lot in common. He was a sweet kid and a part of Mike. His flesh and blood. Will liked the boy's company. He was bound to love everything Mike made and Nate hadn't been the exception to the rule, in spite of everything. At first, Will truly wanted to hate him with all his might. He was the reason they split up, the reason Mike left. The day Mike told him about Jezebel's pregnancy was the last time they spoke in months, until the baby's birth.

It was 2 in the morning when the phone rang, waking Will up from a very bad slumber. Will didn't pick up, too groggy to even leave the bed but he did hear Mike's staggering voice rise from the answering machine, announcing albeit shyly that he had a son, a "beautiful baby boy", born just ten minutes prior. Will kept his eyes shut but felt his heart sink down to the pit of his belly, as if in a roller coaster

and it was painful.

Will was determined to put Mike behind him and spend the rest of his life resenting him and his traditional family. He wanted to despise Jezebel and that baby, wanted to find him stupid and useless. But something inside him kept stirring and he couldn't ignore the force that pushed him to drive to the hospital the next day and step inside the room where Mike and Jezebel rested with their newborn, feeling terribly awkward with a giant stuffed animal in his arms.

Mike and Jezebel turned toward him the moment he passed the threshold. His heart was beating in the back of his throat, he was feeling out of place. Mike smiled at him, a bundle cradled against his chest. His son. Will stared at that pink wrinkled little thing, looking a bit pathetic and frail and for a long moment, he didn't know what to do. He just braced himself for the feeling of deep repulsion he expected to feel grow from within. But then the pink thing opened its eyes and Will's body shook. He knew those eyes. And they were staring back at him.

"I'm glad you came."

The pink thing yawned, moved its feet a little, stared at Will again and Will wanted to cry. He felt as if he had been punched in the gut. Insignificant and small.

"It's Nate."

Nate. What a stupid name!

"Do you want to hold him?"

Brown eyes. His father's eyes. And suddenly, Will was brutally assaulted with the disturbing reality that this pink thing was a piece of Mike. An extension. Mike's vessel to genetic immortality. Somehow. Mike pushed the baby in Will's arms and Will thought he would faint. He stared down at this new human and wondered where Mike was in that body.

He tried to ignore the sentiment of absolute dread that made him sick whenever he thought of Mike's family and was determined to put as

much distance between them as possible, no matter how painful this was. Mike had betrayed him. Mike had left him.

But barely two weeks later, Mike burst into the studio in the middle of a scene, frantic and desperate, to throw a crib with a crying baby at Will, putting him on babysitting duty without much of a choice.

“You’re the only one I’ve got!”

“But I know nothing about babies!”

“Because you think I do?! Don’t worry, you’ll do fine! Just give him his giraffe if he cries too much. I put a bottle in there if he’s hungry too.”

“You’ve got some nerves, showing up here with that thing you created behind my back! You don’t get to dump me like you did and make me nanny to your kid six months later!”

“Please, Will. Jez’s parents hate me. Mine are in Fort Lauderdale right now and I need to be at work in thirty minutes! You know Bary. How do you think he’ll react if I show up at the office with a baby!”

“Where exactly do you think you are?! A Hippie nursery?! I’m shooting all day! I can’t look after a goddamn baby!”

“Put him in a corner where he can’t see anything! He’ll be just fine!”

“Are you out of your mind?!”

“Will. I haven’t slept in eleven days. My fiancée’s body is giving up on her and my boss’s looking for any loophole to get me fired. I’m at the end of the rope right now!”

“And whose fault is that?!”

“Please.”

“Mike...”

“I gotta go. Thanks a ton. I owe you one!”

“Mike!”

“I’ll pick him up at 6! Thanks again!”

Will remained alone in those changing rooms looking at that baby who was scrutinizing him much too inquisitively for Will’s tastes. Fortunately for Will, Chad, his screen partner, had helped his mom raise his three brothers and sisters and was very good with kids. In between scenes, he took care of the baby, feeding him and changing him, much to Will’s relief who felt completely lost and overwhelmed by this mini Mike who cried so hard, he looked ready to burst.

Past this very awkward first experience, his relationship with Nate grew solid and healthy over the years and Will was proud of the bond he managed to form with the child and then teenager.

That was until the bomb fell.

Where did it go wrong? What happened? Was he so engrossed in his job and lifestyle that he somehow sent mixed signals to the boy? Did he do this? Was he that much of a perv? He had lost friends and family over his career so they were probably right.

He was a poisoned apple.

Since he hadn’t been able to talk to the kid, the only way he found to avoid him was to keep busy with work. Scripts, shootings, interviews... For the past week, he had been working mostly all day, sometimes spending hours in Miami to stay the furthest possible from Nate. The few hours he was on the Island, he tried to stay close to Mike and only spoke briefly to Nate. Of course, the boy noticed something was wrong. Nate wasn’t a baby anymore. He could see that Will was uncomfortable in his presence and avoided him. And he knew this hurt the kid. He wasn’t proud of himself. Nate hadn’t done anything wrong. He didn’t deserve to be punished like that. But Will didn’t have a choice.

He hurried his steps to the study. He was having an interview in barely twenty-minutes. A Skype interview with a journalist for a book about LGBT personalities. As he was about to push on the mahogany door, he heard steps behind him and a voice out of breath.

“Will! Hey Will!”

Will sighed and stopped before turning on his heels to see a flushed teenager. Nate bent forth and pushed his hands on his thighs, trying to catch his breath. He looked to have ran a marathon.

“Hey kiddo,” Will answered, trying to sound casual.

“I’ve been looking for you!”

“I’m here.”

“What are you doing?” Nate pressed, not minding if he was invading privacy or not.

Will swallowed. Nate’s eyes were huge and shiny, his lips shaping an O. He was the face of infatuated innocence and Will wanted to berate himself again. How could he have missed that? It was so obvious. Painfully obvious. Shockingly so.

“I’m gonna give an interview for work.”

Nate’s eyes lightened up even more and Will felt his heart miss a beat.

“Really?!”

“Yes.”

“An interview about what?” he asked, blinking with the face of genuine curiosity.

“It’s for a book about famous people in the LGBT community.”

“Oh, that’s so cool!” Nate exclaimed and Will chuckled in spite of himself. The kid was cute, “Can I come?”

“Uhm, no!” Will said, taken aback by the request.

His answer didn’t deter Nate who kept his expression on, not even frowning.

“Why not? You won’t do anything sexy, will you? It’s just talk?!”

“It’s still my work. And I don’t want you to mingle in my work. No

matter what,” Will explained calmly.

Now that he had gotten confirmation that Nate had viewed his videos - the knowledge still made him shiver in disgust - it was even more important to insist and keep the boy at a healthy distance from anything related to his career.

Nate, however, seemed to think otherwise.

“Please, Will! I’ve always wanted to see how interviews are made!”

“It’s just a Skype interview, Nate,” Will noted, not knowing what argument to use, “There’s nothing fascinating about it.”

“But it’s still an official interview for an official book. That’s amazing! Please, let me come!”

“Nate...”

“Please, please, please!”

Will sighed. Nate was so enthusiastic, looking at Will with big brown eyes full of hope and excitement and Will felt his heart sink to the bottom of his stomach in bitter defeat. Even if he refused, Nate would probably find a way to eavesdrop which would be worse. Forbidding to teenagers always resulted in transgression. He should have known about that or he wouldn’t have started doing porn...

“Please!” The boy begged again, almost jumping on his feet.

“Alright! Alright!” Will said.

“Really? I can come?”

Will sighed, “Yes, you can -”

“- oh, thank you, thank you!”

“But!” Will said, silencing him before he burst from overhear, “You stay in a corner and quiet. She mustn’t see you. Understood?! If your father knows I’m letting you eavesdrop on topics that really shouldn’t concern you, he’ll have my head.”

“Yes, yes, I’ll be good!” the teen answered with the biggest smile.

Will nodded. He was a weak idiot. This was a mistake and he knew it and yet, he grabbed the door handle to let them in.

Just before he pushed the door open, however, Nate had a look. Just one look but it was enough to make Will’s guts twist. It was a look he knew too well and had seen countless times on others - lovers and fans alike. A look that should have never appeared on the face of a kid he considered his own.

He shivered.

It wasn’t the fact that Nate was so young. Well, not entirely anyway. Yes, it was odd but Nate had the right to express all sorts of emotions and Will had never understood why so many parents lost their mind at the mere mention of a teenager being aroused. Sure, he liked it better when it was for someone their own age but he hadn’t met a single teen who never fantasied about someone older. He did remember vivid dreams about Harrison Ford when he was Nate’s age and Ford at the time was almost fifty... So yes, he’d been there and saying that it was wrong would have made him a hypocrite.

But being a hypocrite was apparently the basis of Parenting, he learned over the years, watching his friends fall to the same pattern of newly obtained moral values, putting themselves in the role of the parent of who had once berated them for the exact same fault, after promising over and over in rage they’d never do that to their own kid. And yet, fifteen years later, finding a cigarette in their teenager’s jean pocket had suddenly become a crime of the worst offense.

And maybe it was because Will was no parent that he couldn’t understand their bizarre rites, becoming a parent being the strangest of them all.

So yes, Nate had a right to be sexually interested and it shouldn’t have been considered weird. But, God, why did it have to be in him? He didn’t want Nate to look at him this way and the unpleasant thoughts that came with it. It just felt... dirty and misplaced.

He shook his head and pretended that he hadn’t seen the expression

of sheer physical hunger that Nate racked all over his body as the man pushed on the door.

Again, how could he have missed that?!

Nate hurried into the room and sat on the couch in the corner, looking at Will expectantly. From his angle, he couldn't see the computer screen and Will was glad.

Will took his seat at the desk and opened the laptop lid, turning it on. He was already connected to the Internet and only had to wait for the woman to call him, as agreed. It was 10.58am. Two minutes to go. He glanced at the excited teenager and mouthed a "be good" to keep him settled. Nate nodded, his lips contorted in a grin.

At 11am, the familiar ringtone of a Skype session rose in the silent room and Will clicked on the green phone. The face of a woman in her mid-thirties appeared on the screen. She had a gentle face with long red hair and sparkling blue eyes. Will had met her at a convention a few months ago and she contacted him via email a few weeks later to schedule the interview.

"Hi Will, thanks for accepting my invite," she greeted, smiling at him.

"Thank you for contacting me."

They smiled at each other out of politeness and remained silent for a short while before she introduced the reason for their call. In his corner, Nate was listening with rapt attention.

"As you know, I'm writing a book about influential LGBT personalities and I couldn't write it without including you."

Will chuckled, "You're too kind."

The woman smiled on the screen.

"So, I have a few questions. As I told you, it's mostly about you, your career, your life. I want to know everything there is to know about Will Byers!"

"Alright," Will said with an amused smile, "I'm ready."

“Perfect! So, Will. You were born in a small town, that’s right?”

“Yes, Hawkins, Indiana. I stayed there till the age of fourteen. Then I moved to Chicago with my mom and siblings. And then to San Francisco for College. I wanted to illustrate Comic Books!”

She blinked and smiled gently, “From comic books illustrator to porn. How does that even happen?”

“Unexpectedly.”

“Really?”

“Really. I took steps. And I never anticipated that it’d take me so far actually. When I was in College, I had a side job like most students. I worked in a supermarket after class, refilling stocks which was literally the most repetitive and boring task I’ve ever done in my life. I had a friend in class named Gary. And one day, I asked Gary how he paid for his studies because he seemed to make a lot more money than I did and he confessed that he worked for an agency specialized in erotic modeling and porn. The answer, “I do gay porn”, is actually something I will never forget. It was quite a shock to me because Gary seemed like a completely regular guy and I was prejudiced against this type of work, like the next Joe. I was freaked out but my curiosity peaked. You know, the kind of morbid curiosity for something considered like a transgression of the established order. It was strangely exciting but I didn’t want to think too much about it,” he swallowed and licked his lip, “A few weeks later, he came to me and said that they were looking for new faces at his agency and that he thought I had nice features. I was extremely uncomfortable and I refused immediately. I remember going all red in the face and stammering my way out! Anyway, he insisted that it didn’t have to be porn at all. That I could just do pictures for commercials, nothing sexy. I refused again and I went home, shaking like a leaf.”

“I thought you’d stop seeing that guy!”

“He’s my friend.”

“He’s weird, Will. What kind of guy sucks a cock for money?”

"Gays? Anyway, I told you I refused. I'm not stupid."

"I can't believe he asked you that. The nerve of that freak. Please, Will, promise me you'll never talk to him again."

"But the idea had kind of grown on me all night. I spent hours just watching the paper with the address on it, like I'd been asked to go on a secret mission to save the world, it was crazy! I just was so curious. And the next day, I went to the agency and applied for the modeling job. I did a few tests on camera and two hours later, I was signing a contract."

"For pictures?"

"Yes, no porn yet. They were just pictures. Photoshoots for commercials and cosmetic magazines, just like Gary said. I was so excited and nervous. I'd never done something like that before."

"You told me you refused!"

"They're just pictures, Mike! I'm not gonna do any porn!"

"I don't fucking care! You lied to me."

"Look, I was curious. Besides, I'm paid a hundred dollars for just one photoshoot of my face. Can you imagine! One hundred bucks in only a few hours! That's what I earn in a week at this stupid supermarket!"

"Whatever. Please, Will, promise me you won't do anything weird."

"Don't worry, Mike. I won't. I'm not stupid!"

"At first, it was basic photoshoots. Portraits. Black and whites. Artistic photos. Nothing sexy or extravagant and I loved it. I was very, very shy and awkward and not at all comfortable in my body but when I had a camera on me, it felt like I was coming to life. It was an extraordinary feeling. And it paid damn well. For one shooting, I could make one, two hundred dollars in a day. For me who had been kind of poor all my life, this was amazing. Easy and fun too. And from there, things escalated naturally. The photographer said that he'd pay me a lot more if I removed my shirt... my pants... If I took on one or two suggestive poses... And before you know it,

you've gone from two hundred dollars to eight in only one photoshoot. And one day, you end up fully naked and hard in front of the camera and you got a thousand dollars that fell in your pocket in cash at the end of the day. Add a boy in the mix, a kiss, a few touches and you go up to three."

"So it was the money that you drew you in?"

"No completely. It was part of it but not the only reason. I did it because I liked it, quite simply. As crazy as it sounds to most ears, doing porn has always felt natural to me. Making those photos, exposing myself... I loved it all. It was electrifying. I loved the way it made me feel about myself. I loved the Will I saw on those pictures. It really was helping me a lot come to terms with my body, my image and myself in general. And I was good at it. So when they offered that my photos were published I said yes and I made the cover of a gay porn magazine a few weeks later."

"What is that?"

"Mike..."

"What is this monstrosity?"

"Come on, Mike. I look good on it!"

"Good?! Good! You think you look good?"

"Mike..."

"What the Hell, Will!"

"Look, I wanted to tell you ok? I just didn't know how."

"Tell me what? What is this? You promised you wouldn't do anything weird!"

"It's just a picture, Micheal!"

"A picture? You call that a picture? How could you do this without even telling me? Did you even think of the consequences this could have? On us? On our family? Our friends?"

"Mike..."

"I don't know if you're aware Will but gay men aren't exactly America's favorite right now! Do you know how difficult it was for my father to accept the fact that his son is a fag?"

"Mike..."

"How on Earth am I going to explain this to my parents?"

"Your parents don't buy gay porn magazines!"

"No, but they go shopping. They could see this. People could recognize you and talk!"

"I don't care about what people think."

"Maybe you don't, but I do. What about your parents? How do you think they'll react to that? Your mom? Hop? Do you know how hard it is to make people see gay men as cute and not deranged pervs obsessed with dirty sex and strange practices? And now you go around and turn yourself into a whore!"

"How did you call me?"

"You heard me. You stop this madness, this instant."

"This launched my career in porn. After that, I got an agent and I shot my very first porno a few weeks later in 1993. Everything happened very naturally."

"You never had any doubt about this choice of career?"

"No. Doing porn has never been an issue to me. And that caused many problems with the people around me because they couldn't understand why I felt no shame. To most of them, I should have felt dirty, tainted, humiliated. But I never did. And the further I went, the more I expected to finally feel this shame that I was apparently supposed to feel but it never came. I felt fine. And it became a personal challenge. I wanted to see how far I could go, see if there was a limit, if this shame would eventually arise. Eighteen years later, I'm still there!"

“How did you become so famous?!”

Will laughed, “Honestly, it wasn’t like that. Not at the beginning. In the 1990’s gay porn were still very niche. There weren’t a lot of gay porn actors around and once you made a few movies, it was easy to make a name for yourself. And it was also the explosion of anal and gonzo so I was in the right place at the right time.”

“And you were also the official face of gay erotica novels.”

From his chair, Nate rose an eyebrow. Will was the cover of novels? He had to look that one up! How come he didn’t know?!

Will nodded, “For a couple of years, yes.”

“You were the gay Fabio!”

Will chuckled, “It helped a lot make my face recognizable. Because gay erotica isn’t just for gay men, lots of straight women enjoy gay porn as well, so more visibility. And then I started activism and my voice joined my face. It was gradual.”

“Is there anything you regret in your career? You say you never felt any shame but is there anything you wished you had done differently?”

Will frowned. There were many. The first one being how he handled his career and Mike.

“Some choices I made in the beginning. At the time, I was categorized as a top. And in gay porn, just like straight porn, dominant masculinity is very appreciated and sells a lot more. So, let’s just say that I haven’t been a very nice guy to some of my bottom partners. There is one movie in particular that served as a waking call to me. And I realized that my obsession with being a manly homosexual was just a form of internalized homophobia and that I needed to make peace with this part of myself.”

“Rape porn is actually very popular,” she noted.

“Unfortunately. But it doesn’t make it ok. We talk a lot about rape culture nowadays. And porn is a direct product of it. It feeds on

society and society feeds on porn. And I think that it's wrong to excuse its violence with the argument of sexual fantasy, or you know - it's not real. Rape porn is the third most popular trend in the industry. We have anal, blowjobs, rape and teen. In a Hollywood movie, when you write, direct and shoot a rape scene, you want the viewer to feel uncomfortable, angry, seeking revenge for the character. You want to trigger an emotion. It's lazy writing in my opinion and one we mostly use to hurt female characters but that's kind of the idea behind it. In porn, when you write, direct and shoot a rape scene, it's for people to masturbate on it. That's the big difference. The rape that you see onscreen is kind of really happening. In Hollywood, everything is fake. You have no real touch, no penetration. And yet, the trauma is there. Look up online. You'll find dozens of testimonies about actresses who were traumatized by a rape scene. Some needed to see a therapist after that. Actors too because they feared they had turned into rapists themselves. And again, in Hollywood, nothing really happens except in some extreme cases. In porn, the rape is really happening, in a way. Sure, it's fake. On paper. But the penetration is real. The manhandling is real. It's not a game. Directors push actors into the violence and encourage it. They want tears. And for having been on sets where rape scenes were being shot and shooting those scenes myself as the abuser, I can assure you that the ambiance is very different from a regular blowjob scene. It's dark and oppressive and if you look into the eyes of an actor who is on the receiving end, you will see the pain. The director screams CUT and they laugh and smile like nothing happened and all is doing well, but deep down they've been damaged and you along. And when you realize that, it's like having a bucket of ice cold water thrown into your face."

There was a silence after that. Nate was looking at Will from his chair with his heart beating in the back of his throat. He had heard rumors of Will's dark past but never managed to find any videos. And to be honest, he wasn't so sure he wanted to see Will like that.

The woman blinked, "What about your parents? Your friends? How did they react to you being gay and doing porn?"

Will licked his lip, "Me being gay wasn't a shock to anyone who knew me so my coming out was kind of gentle. Except for my father with

whom I'd already cut ties anyway. And the fact that I was a regular looking guy and not an effeminate gay boy helped a lot. I didn't play football and I hated sports but I drank beer and I spoke loud. I was one of the guys. It's sad but it's true. It helped. As for the porn, it was more complicated. As I said, people were really uncomfortable about my career choice. They said that I had issues and that I should see a therapist because to them, sex work was inconceivable. It's still really taboo in our culture. It's not considered a normal job or something you can talk about in the open. I mean, everybody consumes porn. We are necessary. But no one wants to talk about us. We're the elephant in the room. So when they found out, it was hard. I lost friends. Many friends. Childhood friends. My mom was very confused at first but then she saw that it was making me happy so she kind of went down with it. For my step-father, me being a top probably saved our relationship. I was doing porn but I was doing porn as a man so it wasn't so much of a disaster in the end. It reassured him somehow and, ironically enough, validated my masculinity."

"Do you think it's easier for tops?"

"Absolutely. Tops are gays but still sexually active. Contrary to bottoms who are a shame to masculinity. I mean, socially speaking bottoms are worse than women because they are men who have lowered themselves to the role of the woman. And we all know how much human societies love and respect women! So yes, me being a top just like me presenting masculine helped a lot. Had I been a camp or a bottom, things would have been very different I'm sure."

"What is the one misconception about porn that you wish people didn't have?"

Will frowned, thinking.

"Uhm... I'd say that porn actors are people."

"Really?" she chuckled.

"Yes. The most common thing I hear about me is that I don't look like a porn actor. I look normal. Same with education. I can read and write. I have a Master's degree in Art History and I speak three languages. To most people, this is incompatible with the image that

they have of sex workers in general. And I think it's sad. Yes, many porn actors are drug addicts and former rape victims but not all of them. And people shouldn't generalize."

The interview continued for half an hour more. After answering the last question, Will thanked the journalist and they ended the call.

Nate jumped on his feet to join him by the door. The boy looked flush. Will felt bad. There were things he wished Nate hadn't heard.

"It was great!" Nate said, "Thanks for letting me be there!"

"You won't say anything to your father?"

"I'm not stupid!"

"Good because your dad would have my head."

"I won't say anything. Don't worry. But it was super interesting. "

Will frowned. Nate was looking at him with a puppy smile.

"Listen Nate," he said looking elsewhere from sudden embarrassment, "About the part with the videos I made in the beginning of my career, I never want you to try to find them".

"But Will..." the kid tried to say, red in the face.

"I'm serious. I don't care if you watch my movies or not, this isn't the issue here. This video, I never want you to see it. So promise me, you'll never try to find it online."

He was looking at Nate with a raised finger, his expression deadly serious and the teenager swallowed nervously.

"I promise."

"You never saw it?"

"No!"

"You swear?"

“Yes.”

Will studied the boy a second more until he was satisfied with Nate’s sincere expression.

“What’s on that video? Is it so bad?” Nate asked.

Will sighed, “Yes, it’s bad.”

Nate frowned, “Why? What do you do in it? Are you like... mean?”

“Yes.”

“Why did you do that?”

The question was genuine and it reached Will deep.

“What is that, Will? Why would you even do something like that?”

“It’s a script, Mike. It’s not real.”

“Not real? Those bruises look very real to me!”

“He’ll be fine. It was in the script anyway.”

“Ok, so a guy tells you to hit another guy and you do it? Just like that? What is wrong with you?”

“Again, Micheal, it was in the script. He signed it.”

“I don’t fucking care it was in the script or not, Will. This is sick! And the people who jerk off on that are sick! What the Hell?! I can’t believe you would do something like that! You, of all people!”

“No one asked you to watch it.”

“You’re not answering my question. What is wrong with you?”

He swallowed and took a deep breath.

“I guess, I needed this somehow. I had a lot of anger in me at the time.”

“For being gay?”

“For being me. I had a complicated childhood, Nate with some very deep traumas. And I guess that I wasn’t as healthy as I thought. I wanted revenge on life, on some guys. And I took that revenge. Only, it didn’t help and I realized it far too late.”

Nate was still looking at him with curious eyes.

“Look, I don’t want to talk about this with you,” Will continued, “I was young and stupid and I thought I knew better. We all go there. It’s part of growing up.”

“Will I go there too?” Nate asked in a smile.

Will chuckled, “Probably, yeah.”

They smiled at each other. Nate’s enthusiasm was contagious and made Will feel better. This kid was a bundle of joy. The stare lasted a minute. Then, Nate’s brow furrowed in a frown and he looked down.

“Will?”

“Yes?”

“Have you been avoiding me?”

Will’s heart rate instantly quickened, “What? Why would you say that?” The kid was too smart for his own good.

Nate shrugged, “I haven’t seen you a lot lately.”

“I’ve had a lot of work.”

“I missed you,” Nate confessed in a pout.

Will shifted, uncomfortable. This was going a little too intimate. He promised Mike he wouldn’t say anything but maybe a good talk would help settle things down and clear the teenager’s obvious confusion.

“Nate,” he said, “There is something I think you and I should

discuss...” he began but before he could finish his sentence, someone came to disturb the conversation.

It was Ravi, standing behind them, looking cross, a wooden spoon in hand.

“There you are!” he said.

Will blinked at his boyfriend, “What’s going on?”

“Lunch!” Ravi answered loudly, “We’ve been waiting for you for twenty-five minutes!” he turned to Nate, “Your parents have been looking for you everywhere, young man. Your mother thought you’d drowned!”

“Sorry.”

Will rolled his eyes, “Really?”

“You know how she is.”

“He’s not five. He can be away from her periphery for an hour for God sake!”

Ravi raised his hands in a sign of peace, “Don’t look at me like that. I’m not his mum! She is.”

Will sighed again and turned to Nate, “We’ll talk later. Let’s go join the others before your mom calls 911.”

The occasion to talk didn’t come any later either as they all hopped on the boat for a beach afternoon on the shore. Ravi booked them up on a private beach, praised by celebrities where Will could venture without fear of being disturbed.

It was a lovely afternoon, sunny and warm.

Mike and Will were enjoying a swim, Nate pretended to nap on a lounge chair when in reality he was checking Will from over his sunglasses and the girls were playing on the beach. As for Jezebel,

she decided to take some good time on her hands and paid a visit to the beach bar for a much needed refreshment. The past days had been hard on her and her mind a mess for the first time in her marriage.

As she grabbed the twelve dollars cocktail she just ordered, ready to take a sip, a voice startled her from the side - the voice that had been a constant in her mind lately.

“Jezebel, how nice to see you here?”

She froze, her hand shook around the glass that spilled a little. From the corner of her eye, she saw him, dashingy attractive with his blond hair, white-teeth smile, green eyes and sunkissed skin - a galaxy away from Mike’s creamy complexion and neglected appearance.

“Ricardo!” she said, feeling the heat creep over her cheeks, “I didn’t think I’d see you here!”

His smile widened and she felt her legs give on the stool she gripped for support.

“My boat’s parked just over there.”

He pointed a finger at a white catamaran a bit further on the shore. A nice looking boat.

“Oh, I see.”

“What brings you here?” he asked, popping an olive into his mouth.

“Ravi took us away from the Island for a change. It’s a very nice beach.”

“It is,” he gently agreed, still smiling.

Jezebel could feel the fire of his gaze on her face and she shifted on the stool. She hadn’t realized she felt so cold.

“When are you leaving?” he asked.

“Two days from now.”

“So soon?” he said, raising an eyebrow.

“Yes. All good things must end unfortunately.”

She blinked, crossing her legs together.

A bit further off, wading in the water, Mike could feel a hot, searing jealousy spoil the lovely afternoon he was having. It'd been a long time since he was able to spend so much time with Will and this idiot had to pursue his wife, right in front of him, and ruin everything! The nerve of this guy!

Behind him, Will sensed his ex-lover's anger.

“What is he doing here?” Mike asked between clenched teeth, watching his wife laugh and blush like a schoolgirl.

“He lives here. His boat is just over there.”

Mike didn't look at the boat. His eyes were fixed on the duo at the bar. Will bit his lip. Mike was jealous. This wasn't a surprise. He'd always been the jealous type. His jealousy was the reason they'd broken up after all. Will sighed and went to comfort him, crossing the distance between them.

"Hey, it's fine," he said, putting his hand on Mike's shoulder.

But Mike brushed him off immediately, as if Will's touch had burned him.

“Not now Will,” he hissed before stepping out of the water angrily, leaving Will alone and hurt by the unhidden rejection.

Back on the beach, two people had seen the scene and they both shook their heads with a huff of annoyance, one burging on hope, the other sinking a bit more everyday in bitter disillusion.

Mike avoided Will for the rest of the afternoon and the ride back to

Islavadora. Will didn't really know why. It looked like the other man was sulking and when he was, it could last hours. Will certainly remembered, long hours waiting in vain that Mike would start talking again. Why did he seem to be mad at Will though? He hadn't spoken to his wife either and kept sending her cryptic glances that she purposefully ignored. So it probably wasn't just Will. And Will wanted to comfort him but Mike was keeping his distance, making it impossible to even speak to him and this hurt Will deep. He forced himself to smile at Ravi who smiled back although there seemed to be a glimmer of sadness in his eyes. Poor Ravi didn't deserve any of this mess. He was an ideal boyfriend and Will felt like he barely acknowledged it at times, wasting all his energy on Mike instead.

He went to isolate himself on the deck right behind the hot tub, hidden from view where he could just unleash all the emotions he'd been holding up inside him all throughout the afternoon. He really was an idiot. Why did he keep pursuing Mike like that? It was useless, he knew it. Their story was over and a part of him had accepted that long ago.

"Will?"

He flipped on his heels, shocked to have been disturbed in such a moment of weakness, to see Nate looking at him with a frown.

He swallowed a sigh and hurried to clear his tears before the kid could see them.

"Nate!"

"Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," he said, trying to force his voice back to normal and a smile on his lips.

"You sure?" Nate pressed, "I saw you and my dad argue in the water."

Will dismissed him with a shake of his head, "It was nothing, don't worry. I bothered your dad at the wrong moment, that's all! You know how hot-headed he can be."

Nate observed him for a short while before nodding slowly. Will smiled at him again but the smile didn't quite reach his eyes and Nate noticed, his brow breaking into a scowl of pity.

"You should stop bothering yourself so much with my dad. You're hurting yourself for nothing."

Will swallowed. Nate's words hit harder than they probably should have.

"I'm alright, Nate. I already told you my relationship with your father didn't concern you."

"You're sad. I don't like it when you're sad," Nate simply said.

Will's heart missed a beat. Nate's voice had grown awfully gentle and it made Will uncomfortable for a reason that he couldn't quite identify.

"I'm ok, really," he repeated but the more he said it the less the words rang true and he swallowed a sob before it came out, "I can be very silly when it comes to my friendship with your dad. That's childish, I know it. But your dad is my own Kryptonite. I get sad for no reason."

He swallowed another sob, drowning in too many emotions again. It was becoming difficult to hold it all up when he had come to hide here precisely to let them go. He pushed a hand to his face.

"I'm sorry, Nate. I'm having a moment. You shouldn't be seeing me this way."

He pushed his lips together to give himself some countenance and smiled at Nate again, trying to look like a responsible adult and not a crying teenager. Watching the boy before him, he noticed that Nate wasn't smiling back. Instead, the look in his eyes shifted to something that Will deciphered only too late.

Before he could say anything, Nate lunged forward puckering his lips. Will's brow shot upward. An alarm rang in his head and he stopped the eager body, pressing his hands on the teenager's chest to keep him at a good distance before the kiss truly happened.

“Woah, woah, woah!” he said, “What do you think you’re doing?”

Nate immediately recoiled and looked down, as if terrified by his own impulse.

“Sorry,” he said, “I... I didn’t mean... I’m sorry.”

Will observed the teenager with a breaking heart and he sighed, all thoughts of Mike rejecting his affection forgotten.

“Nate,” he began gently, “I think we need to talk, you and I.”

Nate swallowed but didn’t look up. He wasn’t stupid. He knew what was coming. It was bound to happen one day or another anyway.

“Why did you try to kiss me?” Will pressed softly.

Nate shrugged, “I don’t know.”

“Are you sure? Because I think you do.”

Will waited but Nate didn’t say anything. The teenager looked spooked. Will bent forth and slipped a finger beneath his chin to lift his gaze up to his.

“Hey, it’s ok,” Will whispered, “I’m not mad. I just want to talk.”

Nate had a tiny smile that didn’t suffice to cover his embarrassment.

“That was inappropriate, I know,” he said, not answering Will’s question.

Will stared at him for a full minute but silence persisted. Nate wasn’t going to confess anything on his own. He needed a little push.

“Listen kiddo, I’ve been made aware of some... feelings you may have for me.”

Nate’s face broke into a scowl and he huffed. It wasn’t difficult to connect the dots about who had betrayed his secret.

“Will...” Nate tried, desperate to defend himself.

"It's ok," Will said, "I'm not mad. Surprised, yes. But not mad. I thought I was building a parental relationship with you. Apparently, I wasn't."

Nate remained silent for a few seconds, observing Will with an odd expression.

"Is this why you've been avoiding me for the past few days?" he asked, "Don't deny it. I know you have. Your behavior was completely different from usually."

Will bit his lip, "I'm sorry. I needed time to think. I won't lie, this admission caused me to question myself and my behavior around you since you were born. I'm truly sorry if I did anything or said anything that confused you."

"I'm not confused."

"Nate."

"I'm not. I know how I feel about you and it has nothing to do with anything you did or said. I think you're a wonderful man. You're handsome too but I just love you for the person that you are," the teenager said, his heart beating furiously in his chest.

Will was at a loss for words. He hadn't expected such a wholesome confession. He wasn't even sure someone had ever said something like that to him before.

"Nate... Honey... That's very beautiful and deep and a part of me is flattered that you seem to hold me in such a high esteem. But you and I, it will never happen. You're fifteen and you're the son of a man I once was involved with. Not to mention that I just don't see you this way at all. I'm truly sorry, Nate. I really don't want to hurt you but there is no future for those feelings that you have."

Nate knew this was coming. He knew it. But it didn't stop the pain from spreading like wildfire all throughout his body.

"Honestly, Nate, I'm forty-one. For a kid your age, I'm an old guy."

"I don't care about your age. I feel how I feel."

He wanted to repress them but they fell along his cheeks before he could stop, warm and salty as they reached between his lips.

“Aw, Nate,” Will said, watching the boy’s tears and feeling horrible for causing them, “Please don’t cry. What you feel for me is just an infatuation. It will pass. You will meet someone and it will be real. I’m just a fantasy. A projection.”

Nate had a million things to say. It wasn’t a phase. He knew how he felt and what he wanted and he wanted it all. No matter what Will said.

“Come on,” Will continued gently, opening his arms, “Give me a hug.”

Nate hesitated a second before collapsing against the firmness of Will’s chest. It was warm and solid and Nate wanted to stay there forever. He loved being in Will’s arms. Fortunately for him, he was still in a state of shock and his body remained dormant, the hormones only rushing to his head to make him dizzy. Will stroked his hair and kissed his temple.

“You’ll get over this, I promise.”

Nate knew he wouldn’t but didn’t say anything and enjoyed their physical proximity. Will smelled like the sun and the sea. The hug lasted a minute then Will released him.

“Let’s go back inside,” Will proposed, “It’s getting late.”

And it was probably because he was still completely shocked by the conversation and the half-forced confession of a secret he never wanted to share that Nate’s brain pushed out words he blurted out before he truly had time to think them over.

“In Ancient Greece, older men took a younger boy as their charge and taught them the ways of life.” Ok. Said out loud, those words sounded even weirded. What was wrong with him?!

Will froze and stared at him with a curious frown, probably trying to find a meaning to this charade.

“And they also had slaves and women couldn’t vote,” he responded, “Your point?”

“I could be this boy for you,” Nate proposed desperately.

Will was silent again for a short while.

“Nate, sweetie, look around you. Are we in Ancient Greece?”

“No.”

“Am I a philosopher wearing a toga?”

“No.”

“Then why on Earth would I need a boy?”

Nate bit his lips, “I don’t know. I’m just offering. If you need one. I’m here. Willing and available.”

Will chuckled in spite of himself, “Thanks but I’ll pass. Don’t take this the wrong way. You’re adorable. But I’m already in a relationship and I’m not sexually attracted to teenagers.”

“Maybe you could overlook my age? It’s not relevant.”

“It is. You’re not even legal.”

“But who cares about that?”

“I do. I don’t see you this way, Nate. You’re too young, you’re Mike’s son. Nothing works in this equation. Please, do not insist.”

Nate looked down. He was desperate but he knew how to take a hint.

Nate returned to his room, his heart at the bottom of his stomach. Ok, this was a disaster. Not only was his secret out, Will had openly rejected him and Nate had made a complete fool of himself. He’d dreamed about this confession hundreds of times but in most cases, it always led to a steamy kiss in the end. Obviously, things hadn’t exactly gone according to plan.

He let himself fall on his back on his bed and cried for a good five minutes.

His secret had always been a part of him but now that it was out, there was a hole there instead. He was empty, dejected and utterly humiliated. Sniffling and in need of a friend, he grabbed his phone and dialed Jessy's number.

The other teen answered at the first ring.

"What's up?" he asked, sounding like his mouth was full.

"I screwed up," Nate said.

Jessy's voice immediately changed from casual to worried.

"What? What happened?"

"Will had a fight with my dad, he got upset, I tried to comfort him. I screwed up."

"You tried to comfort him? I don't like this part. What did you do?"

Nate shut his eyes and wrinkled his nose in self-disgust, remembering his burning defeat.

"I tried to kiss him..." he mumbled, flushed with shame.

"You what? Please tell me you didn't do something so stupid?!"

Nate only answered with a long sigh.

Jessy continued, "What did he say?"

"He knows about my feelings. He doesn't feel this way. He's not attracted to me. Blablabla..."

"What did you expect? Honestly?"

"I don't know... A part of me hoped he would ravish me against the tree. But that didn't happen. I'm disappointed."

Although he couldn't see him, he could hear Jessy pinch the bridge of

his nose.

“Are you surprised? He may be doing porno, he’s still a decent guy.”

“Unfortunately.”

“You’re a lost cause, you know that.”

“I’m not.”

“Yes, you are. You haven’t even had sex yet. You’re just projecting your fantasies. But real life is different, you know.”

“I don’t need to be lectured. I know what I want.”

“No, you don’t. And maybe you think you do because you stuffed a carrot up your ass but that’s very different from actual sex, man.”

“How would you know? Did you get anything up your ass?”

“No. But I’ve already had sex with a girl and even though it wasn’t like what you want with your old man, it was still very different from what I’d thought it’d be. You really need to stop living in your fantasy world. I’m sure if your old man fucked you for real, you wouldn’t even like it.”

“I doubt that very much.”

“Porn actors aren’t necessary good lovers, you know. They just have more stamina than regular guys. But from what I’ve heard, they’re just drilling machines without much to it. I really don’t understand why you’re so obsessed with that guy. Ok, he’s good looking, even I can admit that. And as I said, he seems like a decent guy. But he’s old, in a relationship and he used to fuck your dad. That’s super gross.”

“I don’t care about any of that.”

“Seriously, Nate, you need to let it go. You confessed. He rejected you. It’s over. Move on.”

“I can’t.”

“This will end up badly. Let it go, now.”

Nate puckered in lips and inhaled sharply through his nose. This couldn't end like this. He still had cards to play. He was sure of it.

Mike was having a bad day. He and Jezebel hadn't said a word to one another for days and Mike didn't even know if he wanted to. He knew he had overreacted. But he didn't like this Ricardo and the way he prowled around his wife. He was jealous. Not necessarily of Jezebel's reaction to him but mostly of the guy himself. Straight, good-looking, confident, close to Will. He just had too many cases to tick about him. And seeing Will everyday like this, it wasn't doing any good to his heart.

Upset at himself, he scrolled down his Twitter feed without really looking at the posts. He didn't even know why he had Twitter at all. He never replied to anything. He despised social media. He mostly used it to follow Will which was a whole level of pathetic on its own.

He passed images and posts about politics when he stopped at one post in particular. It was a tweet from a guy Mike didn't know, **Live-olive**. And Mike would have ignored it if Will hadn't been mentioned in the Tweet.

“Very proud to see my very first porno live! Shooting with @Will Byers was both an honor and a privilege.”

Mike's heart missed a beat. This was the kind of publication he knew he should always avoid before he hurt himself for nothing. He gulped down a lump of burgeoning anxiety and clicked on the guy's tweet. He was redirected to his profile page. His bio indicated that he was Oliver Mercado, San Diego, 23 year-old, porn actor debutant. On his feed, there was a post, hidden and filtered for inappropriate content. Mike clicked on it and displayed a tweet with a link.

“For those who are interested, here's the link to the video I shot with @Will Byers. It was an amazing experience.”

The tweet was followed by a URL toward Pornhub and to Mike's

greatest dismay a response of Will himself.

“Thanks for your professionalism and enthusiasm. It was nice shooting with you! Take care xXx”

The familiar pang of jealousy tugged at Mike’s heart. He knew he shouldn’t have clicked on the link. He knew it. Everytime, it was the same thing. A twenty-year history.

He was redirected to a Website he tried to avoid at all cost. The title was enough to make him sick even before he started watching it for real.

Will Byers fucks cute twink.

What a romantic title. This much poetry brought tears to his eyes.

200 000 views in only a week for a 20 min long video.

He swallowed and inhaled deeply through the mouth to give himself courage before pressing Play.

The video began with a kiss. A very, very hot kiss that made Mike terribly nauseous right at the start. He scrolled forward into the video. The man - this Oliver - was giving Will head. A minute forward more, Will was fucking him on the couch. Another forward, Will was fucking him against a wall. He didn’t look more and pressed the pause button. His heart was hammering in his chest. Scrolling down, he saw all the raunchy comments from viewers, commenting on the scene, Will’s body, the performance and one that left him deeply shaken with disgust.

Young meat is always the freshest.

Swallowing a wave of nausea, he closed his eyes and the tab. No, he truly couldn’t do it. Sure, Will had told him countless times that he didn’t have to watch those movies if they made him so uncomfortable but seeing them, seeing Will like this, reminded him times and times again why he’d chosen Jezebel in the end. This was just too repulsive.

And something else bothered him in that video, beyond the sex in

itself. This Oliver was twenty-three. Will was fucking a guy twenty years younger than him. For someone who kept professing how wrong it was to pursue younger people, shooting a disgusting porno with a young man didn't seem to have been a problem for him! Fresh meat indeed!

In moments like this, although it still pained him immensely, leaving Will had been the only solution there was and he knew it'd been the right one.

Ravi remained silent all throughout dinner, observing the guests around him. The mood was rather sour and all seemed lost in their own minds. Jezebel kept sipping on her wine, her hand trembling around the glass, Mike had a grimace of disgust on his face, as if the plate he was eating was made of something particularly inedible. Will looked sad and distraught. Nate was downright depressed.

It wasn't the most joyful of vacation.

And there were the little looks that no one thought the others were seeing but Ravi did. Ravi saw everything. Nate looking at Will looking at Mike looking at Jezebel. The loop of despair. It was pathetic, really. All these people longing for the one they couldn't have or the person they couldn't be. He kept his focus on Will. His boyfriend was staring at Mike like a puppy in need of attention. Never in the ten years they'd been together had he looked at Ravi this way and Ravi felt a pang tug at his heart. He was tired. His relationship with Will was a dead-end and he knew the other man would never give him what he wanted for real. Sure, Will cared about him, Ravi knew he did, but it wasn't enough. Not anymore. For years, Ravi had drank from the well of *second choice*, of the *close enough*, of the *too lucky to complain*. He was an *almost* and he could take it no more. He wanted to be the one, not *close enough* but *enough*. The perfect fit.

With Mike in the vicinity, this would never happen. He knew it now.

He didn't want to do this but he had to think about himself before he lost it for good. He was too old to stay a groupie all his life.

He watched Will for the rest of the meal, feeling his heart grow heavier by the minute.

Will knew he'd had a bit too much to drink during dinner but he was still very upset over Mike ignoring him for no reason. He hated it when Mike did that. Stumbling a bit, he returned to the bedroom he shared with Ravi, only to find him packing clothes in a bag.

For a minute, he didn't say anything and watched Ravi take piles of clothes from the shelves to slip them inside the bag on the bed. Will's heart missed a beat and he felt a wave of anxiety tighten his throat.

"Ravi?" he asked, "What are you doing?"

Ravi didn't look at him and grabbed another shirt.

"Are you leaving?" Will continued, "Did something happen?"

Another minute passed. Will waited by the door, his heart hammering in his chest. When he thought Ravi would never respond, the other man let go of a sigh and sad, tired eyes finally met his.

"I can't, Will," he said after a while, "I'm sorry. I tried. I really did. But I can't do it anymore," he blinked, took a deep breath and stepped forward, the corners of his eyes wrinkled by a hidden smile, "I love you so much," he said with a voice full of emotion, "You were a dream to me. Becoming your boyfriend, being chosen by you... That was a gift I never expected in life. And I thank you for that. And fate, God, or whatever. I know I should be content with my status, that it should have been enough. There are so many guys who wish they were in my shoes, waking up beside you, seeing you like I have," his voice broke into a sob, nostrils widening with self-contained grief, "But I'm just a man. You know, I always knew I loved you more than you did me and I was fine with that... It was part of the deal. Me, the lovesick groupie and you, the elusive Rockstar."

"Ravi..." Will whispered, trying to halt him before he said too much.

"The other day, Mike asked me how I did it. How I dealt with seeing

you with other men. The truth is, I don't care about the other men. Most of them anyway. It's your job, we share the same thing, I know how that works. But there's a shadow between us I'll never be able to compete with. And I can't do it anymore. I can't pretend that's not affecting me because it is."

"If it's about Mike..."

"Please, Will, don't. Don't say I'm overreacting or imagining things. That it's over between you two. It'll never be over. It'll always be the same complicated mess it's always been. You two have been flagged by the Universe. And now there's Nate in the mix..."

Will frowned, "What does Nate have anything to do with that?"

Ravi shook his head, "Nothing..."

He didn't add anything more but Will knew the words continued in his head. He watched the man zipped his bag close and grab it by the handle, turning toward Will and the door.

"Ravi, please don't do this. You can't leave me. I need you."

"I just need a moment to think, Will."

"How long?"

"I don't know. I'm going back to England."

"Ravi..."

"I need this. I need a break."

"When people say they need a break, they usually never come back," Will noted bitterly.

Ravi swallowed, "I can't promise anything."

He walked to Will and kissed him on the forehead. Will grabbed Ravi's arm. His beautiful eyes were red from the tears. This broke Ravi's heart.

“Ravi,” Will wailed again.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered.

He walked past Will out of the door and didn’t look back.

Will followed him to his car.

“RAVI!” he screamed, “RAVI!”

Ravi swallowed a sob and turned the engine on, forcing himself not to look at Will or he could have never left. He pushed his feet on the pedal and drove off into the night. Will kept screaming, calling his name until the car was nothing but a point of dust in the horizon.

Will remained there for what could have been an hour. He was too shocked to move. Everything around him felt numb, thoughts couldn’t even cross his mind anymore. He didn’t even know if he was truly there, if anything was real at all. The last time he’d felt like that, black smoke had forced their way inside of him. He shivered. The air was hot but he was freezing inside, as if all the heat had been sucked out of him, leaving him empty and exposed.

Too lost in his own maze, he didn’t hear Mike run after him, dressed in a robe and slippers, his hair a mess.

“Will?” he asked, “What’s going on? We heard screaming.”

Slowly, Will turned his head toward him but he didn’t look like he was seeing him.

“Was it Ravi?” Mike pressed, “Did something happen?”

“Ravi left,” Will mumbled, still in shock.

“What?”

“Ravi just left me.”

“What?! Why?!”

“He needs a moment,” he repeated blankly.

“Oh my God, Will, I’m so sorry,” Mike said, “Come on, you can’t stay here.”

Mike led Will back into his room and closed the door behind them. Will sat on the bed obediently, still unable to speak. Mike touched his face gently.

“I’m sure he’ll come around. Things like that happen. It’s gonna be ok.”

“No, it’s not,” Will whispered in a sob.

Mike sat beside him and went to hug him. Will buried his nose in the comforting smell of the man he’d never stopped loving and burst in tears. Ravi couldn’t have left him. Ravi was his anchor to sanity, the pillar that kept him standing.

Mike patted Will’s back. He was feeling a thousand emotions at once.

“Sssh, you’re alright. I’m here.”

Will held onto Mike for life, trembling all over, all composure and confidence gone. He bore into Mike’s eyes, frantic and desperate. Mike was here. Mike was with him. Just here. Before he could stop himself, he crashed his lips on Mike’s and his heart stopped beating. His Mike. He’d missed him so much. From terror came a familiar warmth that soothed him instantly.

The kiss was messy, sloppy and wet and it was mostly Will kissing Mike alone.

Mike was too shocked to react. His first instinct was to respond to that kiss he’d been waiting for years, his body coming to life for the first time in fifteen years. How he’d missed him. And for a second, he was happy again.

That was until he remembered where he was and why. He suddenly thought of Jezebel and of the video he’d seen earlier, the choice he’d made, and he pulled away from Will who was ready to devour him, his face streaked by tears.

“No, Will,” he said firmly.

“Mike...” Will wailed.

“I know you’re hurt but I’m not gonna be your alibi for screwing up.”

Will wasn’t listening, “Come on. I know you want it too. Let it go.”

But Mike kept him away.

“No! I won’t do that to Jez.”

“But she doesn’t care about you and if she were given the choice, she’d see if Ricardo’s grass is greener than yours!”

He bent forth and kissed Mike again but the man pushed him away with more force.

“Stop it, Will. I can’t!” he said with a voice louder than he wanted.

Will recoiled and observed him with a pained expression.

“Why not? I don’t understand. You don’t even care about your wife...”

“I’m not a good husband but I won’t be unfaithful. I respect her too much for that.”

He stopped. He knew he’d hit a nerve and Will’s despair made way to cold rage.

“That’s funny,” Will noted, “I don’t recall this being an issue back in my time...”

“It’s totally different,” Mike said.

“How so?”

“Jez is innocent.”

“And I wasn’t?!”

“You know what I mean...”

"No! Actually, I don't! Please, enlighten me. What do you mean by that exactly?"

Mike shook his head, "You made your choice."

Will stopped in his tracks to observe Mike with a frozen expression.

"Ah, that same old song! My job! You will never, never stop with that will you?!"

"You could have changed everything, Will-"

"Really-"

"But no! You decided to kiss that guy and be filmed for it without even asking for my opinion! Your boyfriend!"

"I don't recall *you* asking for mine regarding *your* career choices!" Will spat.

"That's totally different!"

"Why? Because I do porn?! I'm a sex worker so my need for validation is higher than yours? Well, my bad! I've been doing porn for the past eighteen years!"

"Yes, I know," Mike hissed between clenched teeth.

"And I'm sorry but I never found normal the fact of asking your partner to validate your life choices!" Will continued, "That's not something I do."

"BUT YOUR JOB IS NOT NORMAL!" Mike thundered, making the walls tremble.

Will froze. They'd had this exact same conversation hundreds of times already. But right now, he didn't have the patience for it. He was too hurt to deal with a childish argument.

Mike continued, flushed and fuming, "Your job is not normal," he repeated, "It's sick and repulsive! How can you even do those things and still look at yourself in the mirror! Putting yourself on display

like that. I look at you and all I see are those guys touching you and I want to vomit. Fucking a twenty three year-old guy?! And then you lecture everyone! You disgust me!”

Will swallowed, too shocked by the venom in Mike’s words to react and move.

Mike walked to the door, “I’m sorry Ravi left, I really am, but I’m not gonna roll in the dirt with you. I’m trying to stay clean.”

He opened the door, passed the threshold and slammed the door behind him, leaving Will alone and completely stunned.

Will found his way to the bar on the deck by the pool. He didn't know what time it was but judging by the stars in the sky, he'd said pretty late. He grabbed a bottle of whisky from the bar, uncapped it and drank from it directly. He couldn't do this anymore. He needed a strong anesthetic, anything that would make him emotionally unavailable. Ravi had left him. Mike hated him. His life was a disgrace. No wonder they said people like him were dangerous and depraved. Right now, he was feeling dirtier than after a cumshot scene and this wasn't the kind of dirt that washed away under the shower stream. It went deeper under his skin.

He sniffled and returned to his room, gripping the bottle as he went.

He didn’t remember how he got himself in that stupor. He kept falling asleep and waking up in sweat. Everything was fuzzy in his mind, his head and limbs heavy. Thoughts collided in his brain without much coherence. Ravi leaving. Mike rejecting him.

You disgust me.

He fell asleep again. Tears had dried on his cheeks. Everything was dark around him.

Through the fog inside his mind, he felt the mattress fall under a new weight that wasn’t his.

“Will? Are you ok?”

Nate pushed a bang from the man's face. There was an empty bottle beside him. He knew he should have come sooner. After hearing screaming, he saw Ravi drove off from his bedroom window, Will call his name desperately and cry. Then, his father joined him and they disappeared in Will's room on the other side of the house. There was more more screaming and Mike stormed out of the room. He saw Will stumble on the deck. Then the man walked back into his room. And nothing.

An hour into it, Nate decided it was time to check on the man. He'd had a rough night.

"Will?" he repeated.

Will moaned, shifted and turned toward Nate.

"Hey you..." Will whispered weakly.

"You ok?"

"M' fine..."

Even though it was dark in the room, Nate could see that Will didn't look fine at all. He looked broken, completely broken. Nate had never seen him this way and it brought a pang of pain in his heart. He climbed on the bed and put a comforting hand on Will's strong arm.

"I'm sorry about what happened with Ravi. And I gathered that my dad acted like an idiot as he always does. You shouldn't mind them. They're not worth it."

He laid down beside Will, snuggling his body against his.

"You know, there are other people out there who could love you better."

Will didn't respond. Nate wasn't even sure he'd heard him at all. He turned on his back to be in the same position as Will, both eagle-spread on the bed, smothered by the summer heat and the darkness of the night. Only the outdoor lights made it possible to vaguely see. For the longest of time, there was just silence and Nate didn't move, enjoying the proximity with the person he adored.

After a moment, Will chuckled and spoke again.

“He called me disgusting,” he confessed, “He always does.”

Nate bit his lip and shook his head. No need to ask who’d said that. He switched on his side to face Will’s profile and shoulder.

“He’s an idiot,” he said, “You’re not. You’re beautiful and perfect to me.”

Will turned to look at him. He looked immensely tired, half there, half not. He observed Nate in silence and extended his hand toward his hair that he stroked gently.

“You look so much like him,” he whispered.

Nate swallowed, “But I can be better,” he promised fiercely.

Will didn’t reply. He seemed to be having issues keeping his eyes open. Nate took advantage of Will’s confusion. He sneaked closer to him and rose on his elbow to rest his hand on Will’s chest.

“I can be better,” he repeated, “I want you so much. All of you.”

Will didn’t say anything. He was merely looking at Nate with a frown. His hand touched Nate’s hair again. He seemed to be looking beyond Nate and Nate knew what he was searching.

“Stop thinking,” Nate whispered.

He waited a second, his eyes falling on Will’s lips on which he focused with envy. Will hadn’t moved. He looked half asleep and so very accessible like this. Assessing his chances, he bent forth a bit, slowly not to spook Will away, until he was fully snuggled into Will’s arms. He raised a trembling hand and gently put it on Will’s cheek. He hadn’t touched the man’s face in years. It wasn’t as smooth as his own skin. Will’s was thicker, with a beginning of stubble that stuck on his fingers. He smelled strong too, a mix of cologne and whisky that left Nate’s head spinning. It was an arousing smell, something that he wanted to inhale more deeply. He bore into the man’s eyes, searching for any reaction that he couldn’t find and bent forth again to land his lips on Will’s in a light kiss, not truly believing his own

audacity.

The moment their lips touched, he was sure Will would finally get back to his senses and push him away with more or less gentleness. Nothing happened for the first five seconds. Nate didn't move an inch, his lips stuck to Will's, enjoying the warm feel of them, his heart beating furiously in his chest. Then, Will shifted and Nate was sure he was going to be brutally rejected. But Will's hand flew to his cheek instead, mimicking him, and he parted his lips, giving Nate his first real kiss.

Nate froze against Will and responded as best as he could, letting Will lead. When Will's tongue touched his, something exploded within him. Blood rushed downward at sound speed and all coherent thoughts left his brain. A part of him knew this was wrong. Will was drunk and emotionally hurt. He was taking advantage of him and the situation which was really bad. But Will was kissing him. Nate wasn't forcing him. So it meant that Will wanted it somehow, right?

Right?!

The kiss became more and more heated, Will unleashing a passion that Nate wasn't quite prepared for but that he welcomed eagerly anyway and smiled into the kiss. Will seemed to be fused with renewed energy - a kind of dark, angry energy - and he pushed Nate on the shoulder to force him on his back, flipping their positions. Nate swallowed, nervous. Will was towering above him but wasn't looking at him. He crashed his lips on Nate's again and Nate grabbed him by the hips, touching the burning skin under his shirt, trembling with acute anticipation. He couldn't believe this was happening for real, that he was kissing and touching Will, roaming his hands all over his back and broad shoulders. Everything within him was on fire and when he felt Will's erection against his crotch, he moaned deliriously and pushed his hips into Will, urging him to do his worst.

Will suckled the sensitive skin on his neck and bit into it and Nate's eyes rolled in the back of his head. He buried his hands in Will's hair, thanking Ravi, his father and the Whisky God for having made this dream a reality. Will suddenly straightened up on the bed, Nate followed him and helped him out of his pants with frantic, urgent gestures. It was now or never. Will had lowered his guard, this would

probably not happen again.

He pushed Nate back on the bed, covering Nate's body with his. From this moment, Nate's brain stopped functioning entirely. There was heat all around him. He swallowed moans and sobs alike, pushed his heart against Will, grabbed the bedframe with his hand, bit his lip. He was feeling. Feeling everything. Feeling so much. Feeling too much. He'd never experienced anything this intense before. It was wilder than everything he could have imagined, his fantasies not even coming close to the reality of it.

A part of him knew this was wrong but he didn't care. He closed his eyes, circled Will's waist with his legs, grabbed the man's shoulders with his hands and let go.

Right now, everything was drifting and Nate floated along.

Notes for the Chapter:

Please, don't hate me! I truly hesitated before taking that path but to be honest this was the path that came naturally from the very beginning. It's also a turning point in the story with many things happening. Yes, Will is going to have a very hard waking up and this was probably not what you expected.

I'm trying to write complex characters but if the path the story's taken isn't of your liking, please feel free to go.

I don't want to write anything gratuitously shocking, this isn't my goal but I won't censor myself either.

I look very forward to reading your comments.

7. Author's note

Hello everyone,

This isn't a chapter but a note I wanted to share after the reactions for chapter 6.

I'll be honest, I didn't expect this much negativity and this was a shock to me. I've never been one to follow established moral values and I do believe that unhealthy, although unhealthy, is still a part of life. There are a few comments that I think missed the point and if they didn't, it was I who wasn't clear enough, so let me clarify a few things.

Be assured that I hear you and respect your opinions but I do need to share mine. I'm the author after all and I need to defend my characters. We can totally agree to disagree but I won't let my story and my characters be this much misunderstood.

1. Will is a pedophile

Why? Just, why would you even say something like that?! Where in the story did Will state that he was attracted to younger boys? Because I wrote that story and I don't recall any of that. I actually find this accusation very serious and a huge lack of respect to my work.

No, Will is not a pedophile in any possible way. He's not attracted to young boys and has never pursued Nate or any teenager.

Please, note that I do not excuse pedophilia in any way but it just doesn't apply here. Pedophiles are sexual predators who are only aroused by young bodies and who manipulate their victims. How does this definition even apply to Will here? Because he had sex with Nate at the end?! Really, just because of that? Knowing everything you know about the character for the past five chapters, you read that and you jump to that conclusion in only one paragraph? Are you this quick to condemn? Have you ever asked yourself if Will **wanted**

this to happen?

Calling Will a pedophile is not only wrong, it's an insult toward this character and my work on it.

2. Will raped Nate

Either you missed it or I'm a terrible writer but I remember making it pretty clear that Will was **DRUNK** at the end of the chapter and completely emotionally **BROKEN**. He wasn't himself at all.

So yes, there was a consent issue but certainly not on Nate's part. Because as far as I can tell, having sex with someone drunk to the point of Will is really not recommended if you want to be a good guy. I tried time and time again to have Will insist on the notion of consent in mostly every chapter but it mustn't have been clear enough because you missed it.

Saying that Will is a rapist or that he wanted to have sex with Nate and that Nate is a victim is so sadly ironic, I just can't understand how you could even come to that conclusion and literally switch responsibilities.

Nate took advantage of Will in this chapter, fully. Will wasn't even really there or again, I'm a terrible writer and I'm right to quit.

3. Nate cannot consent

I've heard this one time and time again. If you're a teenager (let's say, Nate's age), apparently you can't consent. No matter what you say, even if you actively want it and say that you're fully ok with that, people will speak in your name and say that you don't because you can't, even though you said otherwise.

I don't encourage relationships with an age gap at all and I can be very uncomfortable with some of those relationships myself. And yes, I totally agree that there can be terrible abuse and I feel so sorry for every victim of this kind of abuse, I do. But it's not because you were

abused that you must deny people their own feelings. And teenagers fully consenting to relationships with “adults”, that exists, whether you like it or not. Just so you know, the character of Nate is based on a very close friend of mine who had an affair when she was a teen with a married woman. Go tell her that she didn’t want it and that she’d been manipulated... (Spoiler alert, she wasn’t and she actually pursued and wooed that woman until she gave in because the woman didn’t want to be with her...)

I’m not diminishing abuse or erasing it but each case is different and sometimes it isn’t as simple. To say, they’re fifteen, they can’t consent is wrong and completely untrue. Let’s be clear, I’m the first to be grossed out by men who claim their attraction to young girls (yes, Polanski, I’m talking about you) but sometimes, it’s just a matter of people and personal perspective.

Again, I don’t glamorize relationships with an age gap. I don’t condemn them either just for the sake of being a relationship with an age gap. I’m actually pretty neutral on the subject until I know more about both parties and sometimes, it’s not as easy as it should be on paper because people and relationships are complex and unique and one case cannot fit with another.

What I can’t accept however, is that you speak in the name of someone else, stating that they can’t feel the way they do.

In this story, Nate is fully aware of everything and fully consents, no matter what you think. He’s not a child or a baby or anything that needs to be infantilized. So please, don’t do that, out of respect for my character and my friend. And if you were a victim of abuse, again, I’m terribly sorry but this was your story, not all stories and certainly not this one.

But I understand that this is apparently unacceptable for the vast majority of this fandom which leads us to the conclusion.

Where are we going from here?

I’ll be fully honest with you, I had a full plot written that I wanted to

follow and I actually was pretty excited about it. Given how chapter 6 was received, I won't.

I may write the chapters for myself, to clear my head but I won't publish them for the simple reason that I don't want to shock people or make anyone uncomfortable. This isn't my goal. I write to be happy and make readers happy, if I don't, I won't. And I won't turn Will into a bad guy and Nate into a victim. I won't do that.

Writing this story and sharing it with you up until now has brought me a lot of joy and it breaks my heart to abandon it because I love that story and those characters so very much - this was literally my favorite story. I wanted to write something very complex and maybe not particularly healthy but seeing the reactions, there's just no point.

I wanted to convey different emotions, make my characters complicated but with accessible motives so that you could see at their level and have a deeper understanding of things from a multitude of points of views. Obviously I failed. Or you wouldn't have all jumped to the conclusion that Will abused Nate and that he's a "pedo".

And even if I continued, I would still need to censor some parts of the plot to make it "politically correct" and I don't want to do that. But I understand that you won't be able to see beyond Nate's age and Will's status and I respect that, I do. But in this case, writing this story doesn't interest me anymore because it means that I need to silence my characters. And since I refuse to censor my stories out of political correctness, I think it's better for everyone that this stops now. My point isn't to make people sick or turn them against my characters.

I thank you for your support and I will keep Nate in my heart and the story I wanted to tell there too. This story is obviously incompatible with this fandom.

I'm kind of gutted, I won't lie. I have spent a lot of energy on those chapters and I was kind of proud of my work on them.

That's life. Sometimes you succeed, sometimes you fail.

Ely.

8. Spinning out of control

Summary for the Chapter:

After what happened in Islavadora, Nate is clueless and confused, Will is trying to cope. As for Mike and Jezebel, decisions are taken and roads chosen.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello everyone, after exchanging with some of you, I've decided to continue the story because it wasn't fair to punish readers who wanted to read it because a few got it wrong or overreacted. However, I'm going to make things very, very clear because I don't want to repeat what happened with the previous chapter.

So here it goes. Please, read the next lines VERY carefully.

This story contains difficult scenes, complex dynamics and characters and realistic situations. I have no intention of making the relationship between Nate and Will romantic. I won't glamorize, fetishize or normalize this kind of relationship. However, there will most probably be more scenes between them like in chapter 6 (at least one) that will happen in a very specific context. I will not censor myself out of political correctness and I will write the story as it was intended. Let's be very, very clear, Will will never become physically attracted to Nate or fall in love with him, absolutely never. But in case you have missed it, Nate is completely obsessed with Will and has no intention of stopping his advances. There will be sexual harassment, sex under psychological constraints, grey situations and psychological distress. And to be fair, none of those will be on Nate's side. He's not a victim here. Nate WANTS to be with Will and will stop at NOTHING to

get him even if Will doesn't. And because I apparently need to spoil the story so that people know what they're getting themselves into, we are at the very limit of Nate being erotomaniac.

If you can't go past Nate's age, if you think that teenagers can only be victims no matter what, if you're part of the "protect the children" squad, if to you it's just about "an adult fucks a minor", if you're unable to have a neutral point of view, if you can't see people as being people, if you're a distressed CSA survivor, a SJW, if you want to live in a perfect little world made of pink and rainbows, if you're obsessed with stories and the world being a "safe place", if to you problematic situations must automatically be cancelled not to hurt feelings, THIS STORY ISN'T FOR YOU SO LEAVE NOW.

I do not write stories for people who can't get past their own mindset or trauma. We are all different with different sensibilities. I'm not forcing you to read this story, you read at your own risk. Either deal with it, or GET OUT.

This being said, I hope we are all clear now. You cannot say I haven't warned you.

For the people who will read this chapter, I hope you'll enjoy it for what it is and won't jump to irrational conclusions. I don't write it to shock anybody. I'm just telling a story from very different perspectives. Thank you again for all of you who have expressed their support either here or on Tumblr. You were the ones who convinced me to continue and this chapter was written for you. I love you guys! <3

Thank you for taking the time to read this very important note.

Ely

WARNING: this chapter contains crude language, a very crude dialogue, heavy psychological distress, substance abuse, deep self-hatred, suicidal thought, depression and rape trauma.

Will had collapsed long ago and was heavily asleep on his back. He wasn't moving at all and barely breathing and Nate had feared he had actually died. Nate inhaled through his nose and stroked Will's face again. He had just lived the most beautiful moment of his life, losing his virginity to the man he loved. Everything had been so perfect although a lot shorter than Nate would have wished. He thought Will had a lot of stamina due to his job and could last a long time. But Will lost consciousness very fast, leaving Nate frustrated that it was already over.

The man was still fully naked and exposed and Nate had his eyes wide open in spite of the late hour. He was too excited to sleep. He had sex with Will. Will had fucked him! He did it! He won. No matter what people had said, it'd finally happened and Nate would never forget it. Will was a part of him now.

He extended his hand to touch Will's athletic chest. Will was so very beautiful and he was just there, fully accessible. Nate could touch everything. Will couldn't back down or push him away. Not this time. He was available for Nate to do as he pleased. Of course, Nate knew that touching Will like this wasn't ok but they just had sex so it was fine, right? They were lovers now so Nate had the right. He was on the list now. He was allowed.

Right?!

Will's skin was burning under Nate's fingertips. He scooped closer and kissed the man's cheek tenderly.

"You are the most beautiful man in the world," he whispered in Will's ear before kissing his lips again.

Will was still sleeping and didn't move an inch. Nate could have kissed a warm corpse, it'd be the same. He smiled at him dreamily

and admired his body once more. He'd seen that body in the dozens of movies he'd watched before but seeing the real thing from this close, touching it, feeling it inside him... This was a whole new level of extraordinary.

Feeling a bit cold, he grabbed his pants from the floor and slipped them on, ignoring the discomfort in his backside, before returning to cuddle up against Will. His eyes trailed down from Will's tone stomach to his thighs and focused on his softened cock. He bit his lip and went to touch it again, feeling his heart push against his ribcage. There were so many things he wanted to do to that body. As he dug his fingers into the soft skin of the dormant appendage, Will shifted, moaned and grimaced in disgust, shaking his head as if fighting a nightmare.

Nate stilled his hand and assessed Will's reactions. He didn't want to hurt him at all but surely this light touch couldn't have caused any pain? He waited a moment. When Will didn't move, he smiled, kissed the man's lips again, stroked the tip of his dick with his thumb and snuggled up into him, falling asleep with his head in the crook of Will's neck, his leg over Will's hip and his fist circling Will's cock.

He had never felt happier in his life.

He didn't know for how long he slept but he was brutally shaken from sleep by Will who jerked off the bed, vomit exploding out of his mouth onto the floor, coughing and suffocating.

"Will?" he asked, alarmed, "Are you ok?"

Will didn't respond and kept throwing up on the floor. Nate grimaced. He'd seen his parents have this kind of reaction before when they had too much to drink. It happened to him once too after he had downed his dad's wine bottle with Jessy.

He jumped off the bed and hurried in the adjacent bathroom to gather some water in the tooth brush glass and grab a towel. When he ran back to the bedroom, Will was making sounds of pain.

"Here, take this," he said, handing both the towel and the glass to Will.

The man blinked at him and wiped his mouth with the towel.

“Nate?” he croaked, “What are you doing here?”

He frowned at the boy, lost and hurting all over. This was literally the worst hangover of his life. His head pulsed terribly as if being drilled by an invisible machine that was digging holes in his brain. His eyes and throat were dry and burned from the inside. His stomach looked swollen and horribly sensitive as if filled with acid and poison.

He assessed the vomit on the floor and threw the towel over to cover it.

What happened? Judging by the light coming from the lid, it was around 6 in the morning. He tried to swallow but the taste of vomit and predigested whisky made him nauseous again and he grimaced. He pushed a hand against his forehead, forcing thoughts to run inside his brain. Slowly, painfully, a few memories began to rush back to the surface. Ravi leaving. His argument with Mike. The bottle of whisky.

He had gotten drunk alone in his room.

Wonderful.

Then, nothing.

A new detail made the situation even worse. He was naked under the sheets. Fully naked. And Nate was there, looking at him with the expression of a confused puppy, wearing pants but bare chested.

“What are you doing here?” he asked again, covering his upper body with the sheet. Fortunately, his genitals were already covered and hidden from the boy’s view.

Nate shrugged, “I slept here.”

“What?”

“You don’t remember?”

“Remember what? What happened? You shouldn’t be here. I’m not decent.”

He tried to hide more of his body under the sheet but Nate chuckled.

“Don’t bother. I’ve already seen it all!”

Will quavered in terror, “What?”

“You really don’t remember?” Nate insisted.

“Remember what?!” Will mumbled in a broken whisper, feeling more terrified by the second.

“We had sex,” Nate casually announced.

Will blinked and licked his dry lips. His brain wasn’t functioning correctly.

“What?”

“You had a fight with my dad. I came here to check on you. You were really upset so I wanted to comfort you.”

“Comfort me?” Will repeated, looking completely dazed.

“I kissed you and I thought you were going to reject me but you didn’t. You kissed me back and then we had sex.”

Will blinked again, his lips parted, trying to let Nate’s words pass through the fog inside his mind, “What do you mean we had sex?!” he whispered in a weak voice, his eyes getting particularly itchy from being so dry.

“You put your cock in my ass,” Nate dutifully explained with barely a shrug, “But don’t worry, you didn’t force me or anything. I really, really wanted it. I’m super glad we had sex. I wanted that for so long. It was amazing.”

A long, very long minute passed.

Will hadn’t uttered a word. He was staring at Nate with huge, glassy

eyes, agape and stunned. What was Nate talking about? None of what the kid was saying was making any sense. Will couldn't understand a word of it. There was sound coming out of the teenager's mouth but it was in a language Will's brain wouldn't proceed.

Then, after the longest of time, Will blinked and a few images began to appear behind his eyes. *Nate in his room. Kissing. Touching. Moans. Hands. Bodies. Black curly hair. Mike but not really Mike.* Everything was very, very hazy and Will wasn't even sure of what he was seeing at all. *Mike, but not really Mike.* Because Mike couldn't have been so young. It seemed like a vague, distant, disturbing dream of another time in a room he knew too well. Waves of horror like those of a tsunami rolled inside of him and his body began to shake violently.

Nate, however, didn't seem to notice Will's distress and continued chatting enthusiastically.

"Besides," he said, "I'd masturbated all day so my ass was already lubed up and open for you. I just hope I didn't shit on your cock or anything. There wasn't anything gross when you slipped out but I checked just to be sure. Sorry if I have. I know this kind of thing can happen. I mean, it happened a few times when I fucked myself. But your dick was clean so I guess we're good."

Will didn't answer. He had barely heard anything. Everything inside him was breaking down and he feared he might have an attack any minute now. His heart seemed to be melting down into his stomach and his eyeballs were trembling, burning in their sockets. This was a disaster. No, not a disaster. *A nightmare.* The most horrifying thing that ever happened to him. Because he could barely remember anything. Most of the memories were just glimpses between two blackouts.

"Will? What's wrong?" Nate asked, genuinely confused.

Will cladded his nudity in the sheet and rose from the bed on wobbly legs that suddenly felt like they were made of sand. He was feeling hot and cold at the same time. His vision was blacking out although his eyes were open. His heart beat had quickened dramatically, still melting from all sides, and sweat began to perspire from all the pores of his skin. The last time he had wished for death this strongly was

when he was stuck in the Upside Down. The world around him seemed to become particularly dark and smelled rotten. The Mind Flayer was coming back to get him. He could feel it. That heavy, suffocating smoke...

"Will? You ok?"

"No. I'm not. And you shouldn't either," he managed to answer in a voice that wasn't his own.

"Why? I'm fine. I'm just a bit sore but I guess that's normal. I mean, you were bigger than my brush and I didn't have much control over what you were doing with your hips."

Will shook his head, his eyes wide, bile rising up his throat again.

"Stop," he whispered, looking at things he couldn't even see, "Please, stop. Stop."

Nate frowned, not understanding Will's reaction.

"You didn't do anything wrong," he said, "I wanted all of it."

Will lifted his red eyes to Nate. He looked like a crazed man. It was a bit scary.

"But I didn't," he whispered, "I never did. I thought I'd made myself pretty clear on this. What is wrong with you, Nate? How could you even think for a second that I was ok with this?! I don't even remember anything. I thought... I thought..." *Mike, but not really Mike.*

"But you kissed me back," Nate pointed out, still confused by Will's shock, "And then you got hard and you fucked me. I'm pretty sure you came too because my ass was full of-"

He couldn't finish his sentence. Will reached forward in haste and pushed a trembling finger against his lips to silence him.

"Please, don't," he whispered as if possessed, "Don't say the words. Please."

“Why not?” Nate said again, “I wanted it.”

“BUT I DIDN’T!” Will exploded.

Nate took a step back, stupefied by Will’s outburst.

“I DIDN’T!” Will continued, “GOOD GRACIOUS! CAN’T YOU SEE HOW AWFUL THIS IS? DO YOU EVEN KNOW HOW CONSENT WORKS? IT’S NOT BECAUSE SOMEONE GETS HARD OR WET OR EVEN HAS AN ORGASM THAT THEY CONSENTED! MECHANICAL REACTIONS ARE NOT A SIGN OF CONSENT! YOU TRULY DON’T HAVE THE SLIGHTEST SEX EDUCATION, DO YOU?! WHAT THE FUCK HAVE YOUR PARENTS BEEN DOING?! WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?!”

He didn’t want to do that. He didn’t want to blame Nate but right now, he felt like dying, robbed of himself, betrayed, violated and so terribly mad. Getting drunk alone was already shameful enough as it was. But this? It was a double betrayal, from someone he trusted and his own body. He had done things he couldn’t remember. It was like a sleepwalker waking up after a killing spree.

“Lesson number one,” he said, calming himself a little, “When someone is drunk to the point of being comatose, you DON’T have sex with them! Even if you think they want it. You just don’t. If I tell you when sober that I don’t want to have sex with you, it means that I don’t want to have sex with you! Even if I’m drugged or drunk or if I say otherwise while being completely wasted. The brain isn’t functioning correctly in those moments! So you just KEEP YOUR GODDAMN DISTANCE!”

He let his body fall on the bed, still covered in the sheet. His head was spinning violently. He couldn’t believe that he had... His mind attacked him with images and phantom memories on his lips, his hands, his chest, his cock... He had... He had... Bile rose again in his throat and he swallowed it down with a grimace of repulsion.

Nate observed him in silence. Will looked sick. His hair was a mess and his eyes were red and puffy. His face was swollen too and his lips so dry they had crackled. Wow, he looked like shit. It was a shame because Nate had just had the most amazing night of his life.

Apparently Will didn't share his excitement...

"Will..."

"Don't. I'm sorry I yelled but what happened is very, very, very serious. The consequences of this... No one must know, Nathaniel. You hear me? No one. I don't want to be mean or cruel or heartless but I never wanted to do that. Never with you. Right now, I'm feeling gross. How could you even miss the fact that I was drunk and not in my right mind?"

"I didn't. I saw that you were drunk. That's why I wanted to comfort you. I wanted to show you that other people could love you. You were more docile than usual."

Will's heart missed a beat. His shock slowly made way to cold rage and bewilderment.

"Docile? Docile?! What am I to you, a pet?"

"No! But... I just wanted to comfort you! And usually you don't let me!"

"Yah! Because usually I'm MYSELF and I don't FANCY you at all! In what language do I need to say it so that you UNDERSTAND! If you want to comfort someone, you get them ice cream, a movie or a glass of water - especially in my case! You don't use the fact that they're *more docile* to take advantage of them and get what you want! That's just the open door to rape!"

Nate opened his eyes wide at that awful, awful word. Will sensed the boy's despair and softened up, raising his hands as a sign of appeasement.

"I'm not saying you raped me. You're young and I know you didn't mean any harm. But you need to understand what consent is, especially for your future relationships. This is not ok, Nate. Not just that but this was also very stupid and reckless. I was out of my mind. I could have hurt you a lot."

He felt nauseous just saying those words.

Nate shrugged, "You seemed to know what you were doing."

"No! Because if I had, none of this horror would have happened!" he let his head fall into his hands, "I can't believe it... I could have hurt you so bad... I could have hurt us both..."

He wanted to cry and throw up again. Maybe shoot himself in the head too... Nate's next words only managed to make it even worse.

"I love you, Will," the teenager said in a small voice, "And I'm glad you had my virginity. It belonged to you anyway."

Will shook his head, feeling the tears he'd tried to repress finally fall on his cheeks.

"I know you think you're being romantic but God, this is so wrong," he said in a sob, "You can't say things like that... I was the first to hold you as a baby. The last thing I wanted was to... *God!*" he exclaimed in another sob, "Do you even realize what you're saying at all?! There will NEVER be anything between you and I. What happened last night is the most horrifying mistake of my LIFE! And be assured that this will NEVER happen again! If your dad knew about this..."

Mike! Oh, God. Mike! He had fucked Mike's son! He had crossed every possible line! He was going to jail! A gay porn actor fucking a fifteen year old, that was gold for the journalists! He was finished. Finished, finished, finished.

"Will..."

"Please, get out. I can't deal with this right now. I'm already having the worst hangover of my life... My boyfriend left me. Your dad... And you... I just can't. Please go. I need some alone time."

Nate swallowed and walked out of the room with a heavy heart.

"I still don't regret anything," he said right before closing the door behind him.

The moment the door closed and Will was alone, he burst in tears and cried for the next thirty minutes, unable to stop. This couldn't be

real. He screamed into his pillow and clawed at his skin, desperate to get out of it. Everything about him felt dirty and tainted. He didn't even feel like himself at all. He had drank too much and lost consciousness to the point of fucking a kid he considered his own.

He never wanted this, never wanted any of this. He didn't even remember it happening. Everything was fuzzy, disconnected. He wasn't even sure anything was real anymore. Maybe Nate was lying? It had to be a lie.

But more images assaulted his exhausted mind.

Kissing, touching. Moans. Bites. A body that felt too scrawny under his fingertips. Mike but not really Mike. Because Mike couldn't have been so young and neither could he.

He roared and grabbed the sheet that he pulled off the bed in despair. Everything had to disappear. The sheets, the bed, the room, the house. Himself. He fought with the comforter for five minutes, kicking, screaming, crying. He was hysterical, breaking down as never before. Ravi leaving, Mike rejecting him and Nate... Nate... He threw the bedsheet to the floor next to the towel covering the vomit. People were right.

He was finally being punished for his life choices. He was a bad person. The only thing he deserved was to be shot in the head. Euthanized.

He stayed under the shower for almost one hour, using a whole bottle of soap to clean his body from any touch and any memory, digging his nails into the skin to make a new one, leaving red marks all over it.

Nate was lost and confused. Why was Will so mad? Had he hurt Will? He didn't feel like what they did was wrong at all. Sure, Will hadn't been very present but it happened, right? Will was still active. He was the one to fuck Nate so surely he was the one in control?!

Falling on his bed, he grabbed his phone and wiped the tears from his

cheeks with his bare arm. He dialed his best friend's number, desperate for a bit of comfort.

"Jessy?" he asked, drying his tears as he pushed the phone against his ear.

Jessy answered with the voice of someone who was still asleep.

"Nate?! Do you know how fucking early it is, man?"

"I think I did something really bad..." he said in a sob.

He heard Jessy sigh, "What happened?"

Nate swallowed. He kept hearing Will scream in his head, kept seeing the complete shock and rejection on his face... He thought that everything would be different now... Obviously, it wasn't...

"I slept with Will."

"What? You mean in his bed, with him?"

"No. I mean we had sex."

If Jessy sounded still asleep seconds prior, his voice suddenly toned up with brutal awakening.

"You what?! For real or in your head?"

"I didn't think it would happen! I didn't think he would let me..."

"Nate, Nate, calm down. What happened? What do you mean you had sex?"

Nate took a big gulp of air.

"Last night," he began to explain, hyperventilating, "Ravi left him and he had a huge fight with my dad. So I went to check on him. He was wasted, like so wasted, man. I hated seeing him so sad. It broke my heart. And he was so *beautiful*... And so, I don't know... Accessible? Like, he looked broken and vulnerable. I'd never seen him like that before. I told him that other people could love him... I

wanted to comfort him, make him feel better. So I took my one chance and I kissed him. And I thought he would reject me but he didn't. He kissed me back. It was such a good kiss. God, those lips..." he began to trail off, lost to his own cherished memories.

Jessy sighed, "Nate, it's 7 in the morning, I want to go back to sleep. Go to the point please..."

"Yeah, sorry... It was a great kiss."

"Yes, I get it. What happened next?" Jessy pressed impatiently.

"I helped him out of his pants, I removed mine and we had sex on his bed. He fucked me for like, fifteen minutes - the best fifteen minutes of my life. I mean, his cock..." he continued dreamily.

"To the point Nate, to the point," Jessy pressed again.

"Yes, sorry. And then he passed out and he remained unconscious till this morning. When he woke up, he threw up everywhere, he was super sick. And he didn't remember anything. When I told him what happened, he was so mad, Jessy. Like, he cried and everything. It was awful. I thought he was going to see me differently, you know. I'm a man now. But no. He just yelled at me and gave me a twenty-minutes speech on consent and how I should never have sex with someone drunk... I'm gutted."

His confession was followed by deep silence and Nate was suddenly feeling self-conscious.

"Jessy?" he called with a quavering voice, "Are you still here?"

The silence lingered a bit more before Jessy spoke again in a surprisingly serious tone that sounded too mature, almost out of character.

"Listen to me Nate," he said, "You need to back off and stay away from the guy, ok? I get it, you're crazy in love. But you need to keep your distance."

"But why? He didn't hurt me or anything!"

“Look, you’re my brother and I’ll always be there for you and support you, you know that. But what happened last night, it’s bad. Like, super bad. The guy was clearly too drunk to realize what he was doing at all.”

“But he kissed me back! And he got hard enough to fuck me!” Nate complained.

“People do all sorts of things when they’re drunk, Nate. Honestly. Plus, the guy does porn. He literally gets paid to get hard and fuck things. That’s his job. I wouldn’t take that for proof at all. And you’re underage. This is technically statutory rape. And it’s really bad.”

Jessy’s words brought a pang of distress in Nate’s heart.

“But he didn’t rape me!” he exclaimed, “I totally wanted that. All of it!”

“Statutory rape means that you being fifteen, you were legally too young to consent to sex with him.”

“But I’m the one who pushed him into sex with me! I was totally willing. Even if Will did most of the work, I knew what I was getting myself into! And I went willingly!”

“You wanting it or not doesn’t matter in the eyes of the law. For a judge, even if you scream your love for the man and your willingness, it still wouldn’t make a difference because you’re underage. Legally, your voice has no weight. No one would listen to you. Will takes the blame, even if he was drunk or in a coma. My dad’s a lawyer, so I know how that works.”

“But that’s bullshit! You had sex and you’re fine!”

“She was my age and I’m seventeen, not fifteen! In some states, I was of age.”

“So what? I can have sex with someone my age but not with someone older?!”

“Nope.”

“That doesn’t make any sense!”

“Welcome to America. The land of the pure.”

Nate didn’t comment. He was still too shocked to say anything.

“Nate,” Jessy called again, “It’s very important that you keep this to yourself. You mustn’t tell anyone about it. You shouldn’t have even told me. This is no bragging matter. It’s very serious. Will could go to jail for this. Twelve years minimum based on the minor’s age. And you being fifteen and he forty something? That can go up to twenty. Not to mention that this could kill his career.”

“But that’s insane. I can have the right to have sex with anyone I want.”

“Legally, you can’t, no. You’re just a kid.”

“I’m not a fucking kid!”

“Legally you are.”

“I hate this country...”

“Well, it’s not all so bad. This kind of law protects minors from harm.”

“No one harmed me,” Nate gritted between his teeth.

“I know. But I really don’t understand your obsession with the guy... Ok, he’s kind of good looking. I admit even if dudes aren’t my thing. But he used to fuck your dad. That is super gross.”

“I don’t care about any of that. I told you already.”

“Whatever. Just, let it go Nate. For real, let it go. This is going way too far now. You need to let it go.”

Nate rolled his eyes and flared his nostrils in anger. This truly wasn't going according to plan.

The last two days in Islavadora were strange and not exactly pleasant. Without Ravi to do the cooking and take the lead in conversation, meals were bland and quiet. Everyone seemed to be lost in their own world. Mike and Will hadn't spoken after their fight. Will clearly avoided Nate and locked himself in the darkness of a guest room - he couldn't bear to look at that bed anymore and kept trying to convince himself that he wasn't a child molester with very little success.

The departure from the Island was bittersweet and so was the end of their vacation.

Nate and his sisters were sent to Mike's parents house in Fort Lauderdale in August and Mike returned to work. For the three weeks that followed, things didn't really go any better. Mike and Jezebel barely spoke. He was still upset over Will and himself - he had clearly overreacted - but was too proud to take the phone and apologize. Jezebel seemed even more distant than usual but Mike didn't pay it too much heed. They'd never really been the kind to overly communicate anyway.

Nate wasn't faring any better.

He tried to text Will several times but no matter what he typed in the messages, Will never replied. And when he tried to call him, he went to voicemail immediately. Nate almost feared Will had blocked his number for good. He knew he was behaving like an anxious groupie but Will's silence and rejection were truly hurting him. It would have been best to never confess anything at all. His relationship with Will seemed to be definitely broken...

At the end of the month, he returned to school, still without having heard from Will at all. The man no longer posted anything on Twitter or YouTube either and hadn't made any public appearance. He was being invisible. Nate had a bad feeling about this. Will was usually very active on social media... Maybe he was still processing the fact that Ravi left... Which in itself had been a shock to all. Even though Nate was glad for the opportunity Ravi's departure gave him, Will and Ravi belonged together. He'd always known them as a couple and to know that they had broken up didn't leave Nate indifferent.

Mike could have noticed his son's unusual quietness had he not been so preoccupied by the changes he saw in Jezebel. First, it was all the afternoon with friends and pottery lessons that she had which seemed to take a surprising amount of her time. Mike chose to ignore it. She had the right to have friends and activities outside of the house. But she never really was much of an outdoor person so to see her suddenly become so interested in socializing was kind of troubling. Then it was the food, the rich meals she cooked replaced by steamed vegetables and dietary products. To Mike however it looked more like an effort into making him eat healthier than an actual change in her own behavior and he didn't concern himself too much over it. But when she started trading her 1950's dresses and mom cardigans for fitter outfits, vests, jackets and eventually pants, he began to question the possibility of an external motivation.

He finally had his answer in mid-September after a particularly quiet dinner. She made polite conversation with her daughters and tried to cheer their depressed teenage son. But after all three children had disappeared in their respective rooms, it was Mike's attention that she tried to catch, clearing her throat to force his eyes off his plate.

"Mike," she began, "We need to talk."

She looked hesitant and kept turning her fork in her hand. Mike frowned and finished his wine.

"Sure. What do you want to talk about?"

She bit her lip, "It's not easy to say. I've meant to tell you in a while but I couldn't find the courage to bring myself to."

Mike's frown deepened. The bad feeling he'd had for the last two months returned full force and he watched her fork turn even faster in her quivering hand. After a good minute of silence, she finally opened her mouth to speak.

"I want to divorce."

Her words hung in the air for long seconds and Mike stared at her in utter confusion.

“What? What are you talking about?”

“Please, don’t act so surprised,” she said, “You and I, this isn’t working out. It hasn’t been working out in a very long time. I’m turning forty this year. I can’t waste any more time of my life.”

Mike’s expression hardened.

“Charming. How can you even think about that? What about the kids?!”

“The kids are growing up in a household without love, with parents who despise each other. It can’t be worse than this.”

“Really? And you took that decision just like that? What happened to you?!”

“I’ve met someone.”

Mike’s blood turned cold.

“What? What do you mean you met someone? Who?”

“You know him. Will’s friend. Ricardo.”

In all honesty, Mike shouldn’t have been surprised. A part of him knew and had known ever since he saw the little looks they exchanged on that beach. But to hear it for real was a blow he wouldn’t take unscratched. Because this couldn’t be true. Not when he knew his wife...

“Ricardo?! You’re leaving me for a porn actor?! Are you seriously leaving me for a porn actor!”

“Mike...”

“After all those years giving Will Hell for his job?! You are leaving me for the guy he fucks on screen?!”

“Mike...”

“You do realize they fuck, right? That’s Will’s coworker!”

"I know. I saw the movies."

Mike nearly suffocated at this, "You what?!"

"Ricardo wanted to defuse the tension and my own fears. He showed me some scenes and explained how they were shot and how he did it to break the illusion that this was real," she explained as if it now made perfect sense.

Mike blinked several times, unable to process what was being said.

"What has this guy done to you exactly?" he whispered after a while, "Fucked your brain?! How can you go from *Will will go to Hell for being a perverted sodomite*-"

"- I never said any of that!"

"- to, *see that guy being plowed on that couch? That's the guy I left my husband for!* What's going on here?! Am I in the Matrix or something?! Is this a test?!"

"I'm not asking you to understand. I don't understand everything myself. I'm happy, Micheal. I've never been happier in my life and I don't want to waste that."

Mike shook his head with a grimace, "That's funny. I have the distinct impression that from now on, your parents are going to appreciate me a lot more! You can't be serious! You can't replace me with that guy!"

"I'm sorry, Micheal. I'm not continuing this lie with you."

"This lie?!"

"Our marriage is a lie, a disaster and we both know it. You only married me to escape Will and your own inability to cope with a reality you didn't like. I'm done being your alibi."

"I've always been faithful to you!" Mike spat, blinded by rage and despair.

"You never had sex with anyone during our years together," she

conceded, "That doesn't mean you were faithful. Because you were not. Your heart belonged to someone else. Your desires too. You only had disgust and contempt for me and even though it brought me great pain, I forgive you. We never belonged together. And I'm sorry you wasted so many years trying to conform. I set you free."

"The kids..."

"I'm not asking for full custody. They are your children too."

"Divorce is against your religion."

"So was marrying a gay man. But I did that too. You'll always have a special place in my heart. But we need to part ways before this relationship kills us both. Our children deserve better than a repressed homosexual father and a bitter mother. This is over. I'm sorry. I truly am. But I can't stay with a man who won't touch me and who's still in love with his ex. I thought that by having a family, everything would settle down and that it would work. I was wrong. We both were. It's time to move on. We waited too long already."

Mike swallowed, his body trembling. This couldn't be true.

But it was.

The announcement of their separation was met with little resistance as far as Shelley was concerned. She was actually rather happy and rejoiced that she'd be "going to live with mom" which hurt Mike but he didn't say anything. Nate remained silent during the whole discussion but Mike could tell the boy was breaking down inwardly. Julie, being only seven, was too young to understand what was truly happening. It would take time for her to realize that her life was going to change if only a little.

The preparations for the divorce were a lot more time consuming than Mike would have initially thought. Jezebel left with her daughters to stay with her parents for a while and Mike and Nate remained alone in the house for a full week. The teenager looked very distressed and Mike knew he wouldn't be able to leave him on his own.

Unfortunately for him, the one person he tried to contact time and time again wasn't available and never returned his calls.

Will was trapped in a nightmare of his own.

Living only off cigarettes, coffee and sleeping pills for the past two months, he had barely seen the light of day and spent his time hidden in his bed or under the shower stream. But no matter how often he washed himself, the filth remained stuck to his skin.

Names collided in his head, making him feel faint. Roman Polanski, Gabriel Matzneff, Woody Allen, Vincent Margara... Acclaimed writers, filmmakers and actors... Controversial pedophiles, claiming their attraction to young girls and boys without shame, Matzneff being the worst by far... Will had despised those men. They disgusted him. But was he still allowed to be disgusted? After the monstrosity his body committed in spite of his own realization? In his memoirs, Matzneff wrote about his disdain for "child abusers" and "child rapists" when he, himself, admitted to have enjoyed sexual tourism with twelve year-old boys and that children under sixteen were the "third sex" denied of the right to pleasure?

Where was Will in this now? Was he part of the gang by force?

Pedophile. Monster.

Where was the limit? Where was he now? He never wanted this but it happened anyway. Should he turn himself in? Should he go to jail? He never wanted this but it happened anyway.

His phone buzzed.

Another text from Nate. The fifth in only two days.

His heart heaved in his chest and he repressed a wave of nausea, his hands getting clammier. He threw the phone under the cushion, cursing it, pushing another cigarette between his lips, popping a pill in his mouth to stop the flow of terror from running inside his brain. Was he still legitimate? Where was he now?

The doorbell rang unexpectedly on a Friday evening, forcing Will out of his chemical-induced slumber. He dragged his feet to the door, grabbed the handle and pulled, blinking at the apparition on his threshold.

“Mike?”

His heart missed a beat when he noticed the second person right behind. What were they doing here?

Mike blinked at him and frowned.

Will hadn't shaved in quite a few days and dark stubble spread all over his chin and cheeks. His eyes were red and tired as if he hadn't slept in a long while and his clothes were mismatched and looked dirtier than usual. He looked awful.

“What are you doing here?” he repeated in a rough tone.

Mike checked around him. There was an empty bottle of whisky on the table, empty bottles of pills and dead cigarettes in the ashtray. The room reeked of cold tobacco, making his nostrils burn. Someone was having a very hard breakup...

“I need a favor,” he asked.

“A favor?” Will parroted.

“I left you at least fifteen messages. Didn't you receive them?”

Will glanced back to the couch and his forgotten phone between two cushions.

“I've been... busy,” he answered vaguely.

Mike observed him for a moment and looked at the empty bottle and the overflowing ashtray with a raised eyebrow but didn't comment. Instead, he motioned for Nate to step into the room, followed him and closed the door behind them, not asking for Will's permission or even invite.

“Look,” he said, “I know this is a bad time for you but I'm not having

it any better myself. Jez is asking for divorce. She's leaving me for your friend, Ricardo. Please, no comment," he added, watching Will raise his brow, "She left with the girls to her parents. Nate isn't on good terms with his grandfather right now. I need to do a few errands on my own too and I can't bring Nate with me. I don't want him to stay alone though. Can you please look after him for a couple days?"

Will's heart missed a beat. There was way too much information at once for his hazy brain to handle. Mike and Jezebel were divorcing? His eyes trailed on Nate who looked down, suddenly uncomfortable.

"You want me to stay alone with your son for two days?" he mumbled weakly.

Mike blinked, "You've done it hundreds of times already."

Will felt sick again. He didn't want to be alone with Nate for two days. He couldn't. Just the thought of it made his skin itch.

"Now isn't a good time, Mike..." he tried.

"Please, Will. You're the only one I have. Nate is very distraught. I can't leave him alone in the house. Please. You know I've always considered you like a second dad to my son."

Uh oh. There came the nausea again. Will moved his shoulders to force his body into a straight position, trying desperately to ignore the memory of phantom touches on his hands and the distant echo of moans and pants deep inside his brain. His vision was blackening. He was going to faint again.

"Mike..."

"Please, Will. It's only for two days. Besides, you need some company. You can't stay locked up here alone. Ravi will probably come back."

Will swallowed. He missed Ravi. He really did. But what happened with Nate - what he did and let happen - was eating at him like bees on a honey covered corpse. Mike was looking at him expantectly and Will knew he couldn't refuse him anything.

“Alright,” he conceded after a while, “Alright.”

“Thank you, Will.”

“Yeah, yeah, no worries,” Will dismissed him although he wanted to dig a hole in the ground and crawl into it.

Mike went to hug Will and pressed his body against his in a tight embrace, his nose in the crook of Will’s neck, inhaling his smell. Had the circumstances been different, Will would have dived into the embrace and held Mike even tighter, enjoying the feel of him. Right now however, everything about him and his body felt dirty, tainted, filthy and he feared he might pass that filth onto Mike.

“Thank you,” Mike whispered gently, “I know you have your mind elsewhere but there’s no one I trust more to take care of Nate than you.”

Will felt another stab right into his heart and his guts, twisting them painfully. He remained motionless, his arms hanging loosely by his sides. His eyes met Nate’s and he saw the teenager look down at his feet.

Mike released Will and smiled at him warmly.

“I’ll try to hurry. I’ll come back on Sunday I think. I’ll text you.”

He stroked Will’s cheek gently with the back of his hand and Will’s eyes widened at the unexpected tenderness. The other man smiled at him with that same gentleness usually saved for lovers only and Will wanted to cry or vomit again.

He watched Mike leave, mute and powerless and remained frozen on his spot for a long while. Feeling Nate’s eyes on him, he forced his brain into motion and blood back into his limbs to function again.

“You can take the same room as usual,” he told the teenager, barely looking at him.

Nate nodded sheepishly and disappeared with his bag.

Will sniffled and grabbed a cigarette from his pack, slipping it

between his lips and lighting it with one hand. He puffed on it for a couple of minutes before Nate was back in the room, red in the face, his hands hid into the pockets of his jeans.

“You ok with pizza for dinner?” he asked with a drawl, his cigarette in his mouth.

Nate nodded and sunk his teeth into his bottom lip.

Will ignored him and slouched on the sofa, crossing his legs. With his right hand, he took the bottle of pills from the side table and popped two into his mouth, his cigarette resting between his lips. Nate went to sit on a chair a bit further in the room, quiet as if not to be seen. Long minutes passed. Will wasn't looking at Nate at all. He kept puffing on his cigarette. He could see the kid from the periphery but his body was frozen into himself and he couldn't find the strength to acknowledge him.

“Will?” Nate asked after a good five minutes of complete silence.

The boy's voice was low and hesitant and Will knew he couldn't continue to act as if the teenager weren't there.

“What?” he answered roughly.

“Do you hate me?”

The question fell so much out of nowhere that Will softened up instantly. For the first time since his arrival, he noticed how sad and hurt the teen actually looked and it broke his heart.

“Hate you?” he whispered in shock at such a strong word, “No Nate, I could never hate you.”

“Then why haven't you answered any of my texts in the past weeks?”

“I couldn't.”

“Why not?”

“Please, Nate, don't,” Will whispered, feeling suddenly exhausted.

Nate looked down in defeat.

They didn't exchange another word for the rest of the evening. He usually loved this apartment. It was huge, nicely decorated and had a great view on Chicago. He'd had some of his best memories here. Usually. Before. Now, Ravi and Will's gentle couple argument had been replaced by cold, lonely silence and it was making Nate anxious. Will ordered pizza for Nate - the one he always ordered when Nate spent the night here - but only had cigarettes for dinner himself. Instead of binging TV shows as they always did, Nate watched TV (or rather, pretended to) alone while Will scrolled on his phone.

At 10pm, Will excused himself and disappeared into the room he used to share with Ravi and abandoned Nate on the sofa. Nate fought a wave of sadness and remained only ten minutes more on his own before switching the TV off, unable to bear the dark loneliness. He stopped before Will's door with a missed heartbeat. He was so sad... Will was just behind that door. He wanted to crawl into his arms and snuggle up as he did in Islavadora, feeling Will's skin against his own for comfort and warmth. He put his hand flat on the door and took a deep breath. Maybe they could just talk. He just wanted to see him, hear the sound of his voice. His other hand found the handle and he pulled gently but nothing moved.

The door was locked.

Will had barricaded himself from Nate. This hurt him deeply and the teenager swallowed a sob before dragging his feet to his own bedroom and sat on the bed. Everything around him felt dead. He tried to call Jessy but his friend didn't answer. He was truly alone.

Will's heart quivered when he saw the handle of his door turn. He closed his eyes and tried to calm himself. He knew he was being absurd and childish. This was just a kid, goddammit! Nate was harmless. The only thing to blame was the whisky he abused and his stupid brain that hadn't been able to function correctly.

Nate didn't insist though and the handle didn't move again.

After a good thirty minutes, he began to hear sobs from the room Nate occupied. Soft at first then louder and louder. He frowned, his heartbeat quickening.

Nate was crying.

He felt a pang of pain inside him. The kid's parents were divorcing. His life was going to change dramatically. And Jezebel leaving for Ricardo? How could he have missed that?! He'd been so engrossed in his own misery that he'd basically lived like an hermit for the past two months.

Everything was spinning out of control.

The harder Nate cried, the worst Will was feeling. Something inside him stirred, urging him to move from his bed and rush to check on the distressed teenager. He was the adult, the surrogate caretaker. His primary role was to care for and protect the teenager, not act like one. But after what happened, any physical contact between them felt inappropriate and perverted and his head span with every new sob that reached him from beyond the walls.

Before Islavadora, he would have rushed to his side and brought him in a hug, drying his tears, ushering comforting words. There would have been no hesitancy, no fear, no prickling skin. Before Islavadora he would have acted like a father.

Before Islavadora.

Phantom touches burned his hands and soul and he remained frozen behind his locked door.

He couldn't comfort Nate. He had lost all legitimacy to. He was a fraud.

Notes for the Chapter:

So, here we are. Will is dealing with lots of self-hatred and self-doubt. And so we're clear, no, he's not doubting his attraction for Nate. He KNOWS he isn't attracted to Nate. This is just the self-hatred making him doubt.

As for Ravi, he'll be back. I promise.

Thank you for reading the chapter if you have.